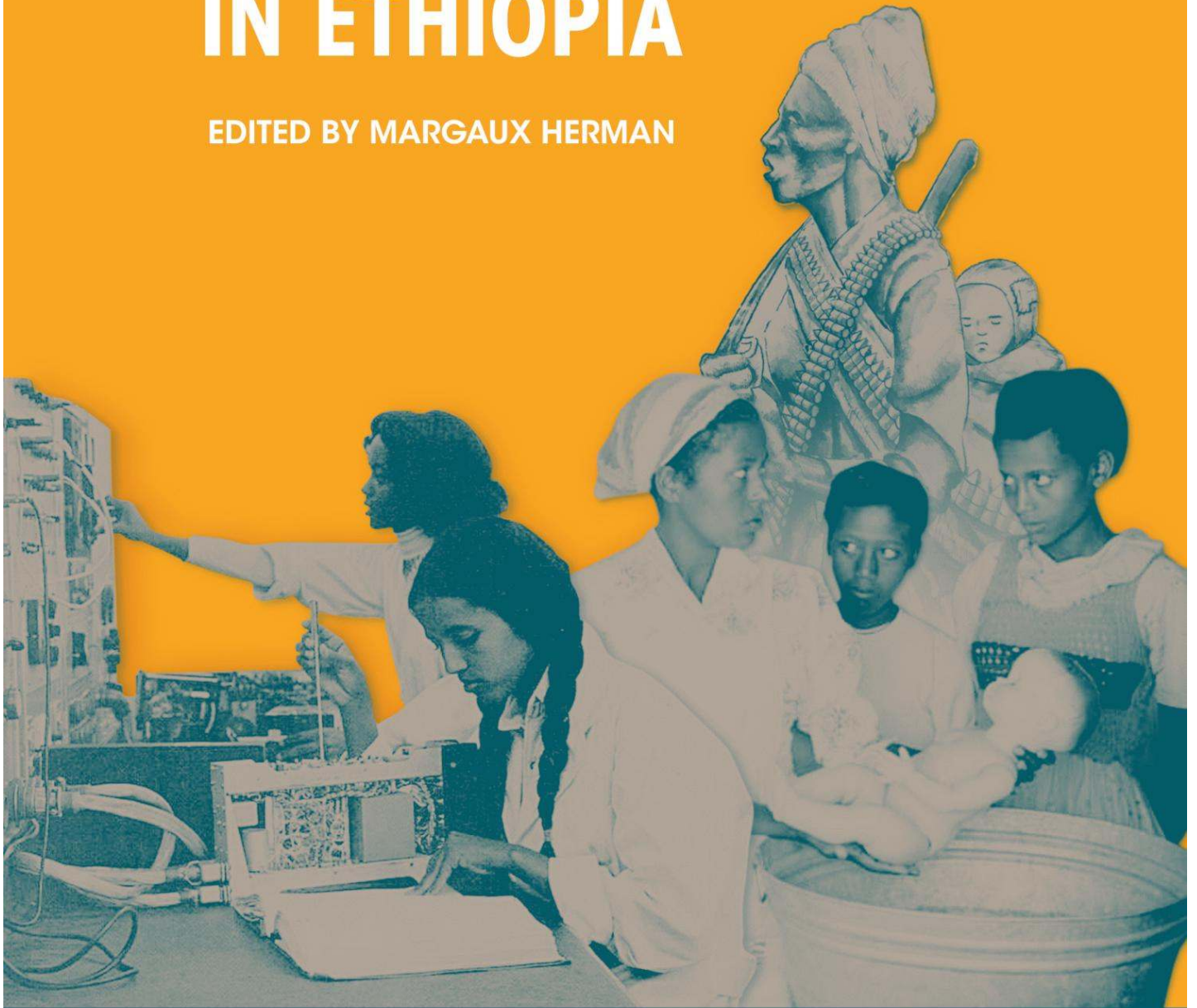


HISTORY OF WOMEN IN ETHIOPIA

EDITED BY MARGAUX HERMAN



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Under the direction of Margaux Herman

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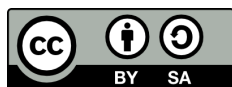
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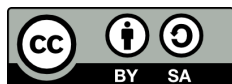
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ABSTRACT

This volume on Ethiopian women's history is a pioneering project in Ethiopian educational documentation, bringing together the research that has been developed on Ethiopian women's

history up to the 2010s. It examines a wide range of topics related to women's issues using critical, methodological and chronological approaches. Nineteen researchers worked on the project in all its political, religious and social dimensions, exploring women's issues related to religion, work, education, political and economic participation, health, sports, etc. Each theme has its own dedicated section, made up of successive chapters that either attempt to cover the period from antiquity to the present day, or analyse sub-themes from different perspectives.

The volume brings together historians and social scientists from Ethiopia and abroad who share a common interest in developing the field of women's history and gender in Ethiopia. They have worked together to address different methodological issues and topics in a single volume, with the aim of being used as a reference material in an academic context. It is the first attempt of its kind to provide a scholarly and academic overview of Ethiopian women's history. It presents the various studies that have been carried out in this field of knowledge, with chapters that synthesise previous research, present the state of the art of thematic studies, or propose original research in still unexplored areas of study.

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MARGAUX HERMAN (ED.)

Dr Margaux Herman initiated, coordinated and edited the volume. Dr Herman is a historian who began her career in Paris at La Sorbonne University and then as Assistant Professor at Debre Berhan University. She is currently Assistant Professor at the Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales (Inalco) in Paris, France. She has brought together senior and junior Ethiopian and international scholars to produce a unique volume aimed at supporting the development of education and quality teaching at university level.

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Ad'É Books, Contemporary Horn of Africa

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List of Contributors

Bahru Zewde (PhD), Emeritus Professor of History at Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia. Former Executive Director of the Forum for Social Studies, Vice-President of the Association of African Historians; Ethiopian Academy of Sciences, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Prof. Bahru Zewde is Emeritus Professor of History at Addis Ababa University and founding Fellow and Vice President of the Ethiopian Academy of Sciences. He has authored many books and articles, notably *A History of Modern Ethiopia, 1855–1974* (Oxford: James Currey, 1991), *Pioneers of Change in Ethiopia: The Reformist Intellectuals of the Early Twentieth Century* (Oxford: James Currey, 2002) and *The Quest for Socialist Utopia: The Ethiopian Student Movement c. 1960–1974* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2014), a book finalist for the Bethwell A. Ogot Book Prize in 2015.

Benoit Gaudin (PhD), Assistant Professor of Social Sciences, University of Versailles Saint-Quentin-en Yvelines (UVSQ), France.

Dr. Benoit Gaudin is Assistant Professor at the Université de Versailles Saint Quentin (UVSQ). His research focuses on the social and cultural determinants of East African athletics. Among his recent publications, he is the author of the book *Coueurs de fonds est-africains : Comment expliquer leurs performances sportives ?* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2022).

Bethlehem Tekola (PhD), Research Associate at King's College London, Great Britain.

Dr. Bethlehem Tekola is a transdisciplinary researcher with a keen interest in qualitative research and in working with marginalized and vulnerable groups. She is the author of *Poverty and the Social Context of Sex Work in Addis Ababa: An Anthropological Perspective* (Addis Ababa: Forum for Social Studies, 2005) and *Narratives of Three Prostitutes in Addis Ababa* (Addis Ababa: Center for Research Training and Information for Women in Development, Addis Ababa University, 2002).

Constance Perrin-Joly (PhD), Director of the Institute for Social Research in Africa (IFSRA), Burkina Faso and Researcher, Interdisciplinary Institute of Social Issues (IRIS) Paris (France). Associate Researcher at the *Centre français des études éthiopiennes* (French Centre for Ethiopian Studies) / Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Specialist of work, lifecourse analysis and visual studies, Dr. Constance Perrin-Joly is Director of the Institute for Social Research in Africa (IFSRA, Burkina Faso). Among her latest publications, the article written with Laure de Verdalle compares the cases of Germany, France and Ethiopia and is titled “Entrepreneurship: Moral Categorizations Across Three Countries,” in *Shifting Categories of Work*, edited by Lisa Herman and Benedicte Zimmermann (New York, Oxford: Routledge, 2022).

Derese Ayenachew (PhD), Assistant Professor, Research Fellow, I Tatti – The Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies, Florence (Italy).

Former Assistant Professor at Debre Berhan University, the research of Dr. Derese Ayenachew explores the interactions and integrations of medieval and early modern Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa. His recent book is *Selomonawyan: A History of the political administration of Ethiopia (1270-1529)* (JAJAW Publishers, Addis Ababa, 2021, 376 p.).

Gennet Zewide (PhD), Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Dr. Gennet Zewide is an academic and a politician. She was a member of the Ethiopian student movement and then of the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Party (1960s-70s) and imprisoned from 1979 to 1986. A member of the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), she became Minister of Education of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (1991–2006) and Ethiopian Ambassador to India (2006–2014). She is the author of *Resistance, Freedom and Empowerment: The Ethiopian Women’s Struggle* (Dehli: Concept Publishing Company, 2014).

Habtam Mengistie Tegegne (PhD), Assistant Professor of African History, Federated Department of History, Rutgers University-Newark, New Jersey, USA.

Dr. Habtam Mengistie Tegegne is Assistant Professor of African History at Rutgers University, Newark. His research focuses on a critical understanding of the social and economic history of Ethiopia. He is the author of *Barara-Addis Ababa’s Predecessor: Development, Destruction, and Refoundation: The Untold History of Ethiopia* [Amharic Edition], edited by Bezza Tesfaw (Trenton: The Red Sea Press, 2020).

Margaux Herman (PhD), Assistant Professor in Ethiopian and East African History, Institut national des langues et civilisations orientales (INALCO), Paris, France. Associate Researcher at the Centre français des études éthiopiennes (French Centre for Ethiopian Studies) / Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Dr. Margaux Herman is Assistant Professor in Ethiopian and East African History at the *Institut national des langues et civilisations orientales (INALCO)*, Paris, France. Her research focuses on the history of Ethiopian women in a long-term perspective. Her earlier research focused on Ethiopian female elites from the Middle Ages to the 19th century. Her more recent research will explore the history of women at work, 1850–1974. Among her publications, she is the scientific editor of this volume and the author of “Towards a History of Women in Medieval Ethiopia,” in *Companion to Medieval Ethiopia and Eritrea*, edited by Samantha Kelly, 365–94 (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2020).

Marie-Laure Derat (PhD), Senior Researcher, Director of Research at CNRS, Paris, France; Director of the Archaeological Mission Lalibela (since 2019).

Dr. Marie-Laure Derat is a historian, specialist in Ethiopia in the medieval period. After working on the Solomonic dynasty, which exercised power over the Christian kingdom of Ethiopia from 1270 onwards, she focused her research on the dynasty of the Zag^we holy kings (11th–13th century). She has authored many books and articles. Her most recent books are *L'énigme d'une dynastie sainte et usurpatrice dans le royaume chrétien d'Éthiopie, x^e–xiii^e siècle* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018) and *Lalibela, site rupestre chrétien d'Éthiopie* (Toulouse: Presses universitaires du Midi, 2019) that she coauthored with Claire Bosc-Tiessé.

Marina de Regt (PhD), Assistant Professor, Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Netherlands.

Dr. Marina de Regt is Associate Professor at the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology of *Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam*. Her research focuses mainly on gender, labour and migration in Yemen and Ethiopia. She co-edited with Bina Fernandez the book *Migrant Domestic Workers in the Middle East* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) and is one of the coauthors of *Adolescent Girls' Migration in the Global South: Transitions into Adulthood* (written together with Katarzyna Grabska and Nicoletta Del Franco) (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

Meron Zeleke Eresso (PhD), Assistant Professor, Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia.

Dr. Meron Zeleke Eresso is Associate Professor at Addis Ababa University and Editor-in-Chief of Ethiopian Journal of Human Rights (EJHR). Her research areas are gender, migration, industrial jobs and conflict in the Horn of Africa. Her most recent publications are “Women in Ethiopia” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of African Women's History*, edited by Dorothy Hudgons (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021) and with Lahra Smith, *African Perspectives & Experiences of South-South Migration* (London: Routledge, 2023).

Pierre Guidi (PhD), Full Researcher, CEPED (Center Population & Development), *Institut de recherche pour le développement* / Marseille, France.

Dr. Pierre Guidi is a historian specialising in contemporary Ethiopia. His research focuses on the role of education in the construction of the Ethiopian nation. He also works on the history of women's education and women's activism in contemporary Ethiopia. He is the author of the book *Éduquer la nation en Éthiopie. École, État et identités dans le Wolaita (1941–1991)* (Montpellier: IRD Éditions; Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2020).

Rahwa M. Weldemichael (PhD), Associate Director of Health Financing and Health Systems Strengthening at PAI, Washington DC, USA.

Dr. Rahwa M. Weldemichael is Associate Director of Health Financing and Health Systems Strengthening at PAI, Washington DC, USA. Her research focuses on sexual and reproductive health and gender. Among her recent publications is an article titled “Gender Differences in Experiences with and Adjustments to Infertility: The Case of Health Attendants of Family Guidance Association Ethiopia” (*Ethiopian Journal of Development Research* 39, no. 1, 2019) and a blog titled “Leveraging Social Accountability to Include Family Planning in Country-Level Universal Health Coverage: Four Lessons Learned from PAI's UHC Engage Project” published in April 2023 on PAI website (<https://pai.org>).

Samuel Andreas Admasie, (PhD), International Institute of Social History (IISH), the Netherlands, and Labour Movement's Archives and Library (Sweden).

Dr. Samuel Andreas Admasie is a regional specialist for Africa at the International Institute of Social History and an affiliate researcher at the Labour Movement's Archives and Library. He is the author of the book *The Ethiopian Labour Movement: Trade Unions, Collective Action and Contestation, 1960–2020* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2024), an associate editor of the *Journal of Labour and Society*, and member of the editorial board of *Labour History*.

Shimeles Bonsa Gulema (PhD), Assistant Professor of History and Africana Studies at Stony Brook University (SUNY), New York, USA.

Dr. Shimelis Bonsa Gulema is Associate Professor of modern African history and politics at Stony Brook University, New York. His research interest includes modern and contemporary African history and politics with a focus on Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa. He is the author of monographs, book chapters, and articles including the book he recently coedited *The Horn of Africa and Italy: Colonial, Postcolonial and Transnational Cultural Encounters* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2018).

Silvia Bruzzi (PhD), Assistant Professor, University of Turin.

Dr. Silvia Bruzzi is Assistant Professor in African History at the University of Turin. Her research focuses on the social history of Modern Northeast Africa. She is the author of the book *Islam and Gender in Colonial Northeast Africa* (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

Tamirat Gebremariam, (PhD candidate), senior lecturer in Ethiopian and African History, Debre Berhan University, Ethiopia.

Currently a PhD student in the Department of History, Addis Ababa University, Tamirat G/Mariam is a senior lecturer in Ethiopian and African history. His research interests include leisure, modern sports history and women's history. In 2019, he published "Sports and Physical Education in Ethiopia during the Italian Occupation, 1936–1941," in *Sports in African History, Politics, and Identity Formation*, edited by Michael J. Gennaro and Saheed Aderinto (Oxford, New York: Routledge, 2019).

Thomas Osmond (PhD), Anthropologist, Associate Researcher at CFEE, Ethiopia.

Dr. Thomas Osmond is a Social Anthropologist. For more than ten years, he was Assistant Professor at various universities in the Horn of Africa. He is a consultant for French and British organizations and an Administrative Manager for the French Academic Network for African Studies (CNRS, GIS Études africaines en France, Paris/Aubervilliers). His research mostly focuses in the Oromiya Region on identity dynamics, ethnic nationalism, religious reformism, cultural policies and regional migrations. Amongst his publications, he is the author of "The Awash River in Oromo Historical Narratives" In *Movements in Ethiopia, Ethiopia in Movement, Proceedings of the 18th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, edited by Mohamed Hassen and Eloi Ficquet, 333–48 (Los Angeles: Institute of Ethiopian Studies; Addis Ababa: French Centre of Ethiopian Studies, Tsehai Publishers, 2016).

Verena Böll, (PhD), Cataloguer of Ethiopian Manuscripts at Monumenta Vitruvii and Qalamos, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Germany.

Dr. Verena Böll's research focuses on EOTC literature and all fields of religious life in Ethiopia. She is the author of *Unsere Herrin Maria. Die traditionelle äthiopische Exegese der Marienanaphora des Cyriacus von Behnesa* [Our Lady Mary. The Ethiopian traditional exegesis of the Qeddase Maryam of Cyriacus of Behnesa] (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, Äthiopistische Forschungen 48, 1998) and of "Rastafarian Perceptions of the Christian Burial of Emperor Ḥaylā Ṣəllase I. (2000)" In *Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity in a Global Context. Entanglements and Disconnections*, edited by Stanislaw Paulau, and Martin Tamcke.

Alula Pankhurst

Foreword

“You will share my joy at re-entering my capital. Your unceasing efforts and support in the just cause of Ethiopia will never be forgotten by myself or my people.”

Cable from Haile Selassie to Sylvia Pankhurst,
17 May 1941.

This volume introducing studies on Ethiopian women is a timely and important contribution bringing together scholarship on the multiple roles of women in Ethiopian society. By bringing to light the neglected field of women’s studies in Ethiopia, it attempts to redress the historical, cultural, social, economic and political biases. Ethiopian history had tended to be presented largely as the preserve of male leaders seen through the eyes of mainly male and often foreign authors. Writings about women have largely concentrated on queens and elite women, whereas issues concerning working women and their roles in politics, war, labour, education, health and sports, and the challenges they face in the context of patriarchal society norms and their endurance and achievements have often been neglected. This collective work begins to fill these lacunae, and sets out agendas for further research. It will therefore be a useful resource for academics, teachers and students and can serve as an important catalyst to stimulate graduate studies on Ethiopian women and encourage Ethiopian women themselves to write about their history.

Organised into nine parts, the volume covers a broad and comprehensive range of topics including religion, politics, war, work, family, education, health and sport. The book’s editor, Margaux Herman, sets the scene in Part One by addressing the challenges of the historiography of women’s studies and gender relations in Ethiopia.

In Part Two, the author highlights the limitations due to the fact that most sources are written by men and even when women’s and gender issues are raised these are seen primarily from male perspectives. This chapter provides an overview and interpretation of women in mythology starting with our common ancestor *Dəñqəñäš*, known globally as Lucy, *Makədda*, known as the Queen of Sheba, the legendary Queen Yodit/Gudit, and Akko Manoyye, the last ancestral queen of the Guji Oromo.

Following on from the overview on mythology, the third part comprises three chapters by addressing women and religion in the three main religious traditions, opening the door for a rich field of research which has hardly been explored. The first chapter by Verena Böll on Christianity reveals the role of women from biblical times as worshippers, benefactors, and church builders, but also as saints and martyrs, and as theologians, scholars and authors in their own right. The second by Meron Zeleke and Sylvia Bruzzi on Islam highlights the role of women from the mid-19th century as holy women and scholars particularly in the Sufi traditions with a focus on Harar. The third, by Thomas Osmond, on traditional beliefs explores the relationship of “traditional” religions with Christianity and Islam and focuses on the role of women in Oromo rituals as cult leaders and saints and in promoting peace and social unity.

Part Four addresses women in politics from historical times to the present through four chapters. The first by Margaux Herman discusses Ethiopian queens from the medieval period onwards, illustrating the role of powerful queens such as Āleni, Säblä Wängel, Məntəwwab and Taytu, and reveals their key roles often behind the scenes as advisors to kings, notably in diplomacy and theological affairs. The other three contributions focus on more recent times. Bahru Zewde’s chapter on women in the student movements focuses on the challenges women faced from the 1960s and their struggles for participation and representation notably in study groups, and in the definition of the “woman question” within socialism. The author documents the establishment of a separate women’s organisation led by Marta Mebratu, which was unable to gain full autonomy and the *Därg*’s co-opting the “woman question,” by establishing the Revolutionary Ethiopian Women’s Association. The third chapter by Gennet Zewide on women’s political participation in the revolutionary period, outlines the history of women’s associations, the role of women in the *zämäch’a*, Development through Cooperation Campaign and the struggles and endurance of women within and against the *Därg* regime in the face of male-dominated institutions. The last chapter, by Gennet Zewide and Margaux Herman, reviews constitutional and legal changes since the EPRDF took power, with the 1995 Constitution, the inclusion of gender in development policies and strategies, and women’s involvement in parliaments, leadership positions, elections and political participation including in civil society organisations.

The fifth part follows on by focusing on women and war, with a chapter by Margaux Herman in which she shows that women played key roles from medieval times and especially during the battle of Adwa and in resistance to the Italian Fascist occupation. Women played key roles motivating warriors, supporting campaigns through provisions and food, as nurses but also as strategists and fighters in the battlefield.

Part Six, which is on women at work comprises four chapters. The first is by Derese Ayenachew on women in craftsmanship and outlines women's roles as artisans in pottery and especially spinning, starting with archaeological evidence through medieval times. The author focuses on describing the important role of women in spinning for imperial courts in the 19th century. Samuel Andreas Admasie's chapter on working class women addresses the crucial role of women in the workforce especially during the 20th century. The author reviews the diverse areas in which women have worked, from the services sector to farms and industries, from businesswomen to household workers. This contribution highlights the gender gaps, discrimination and poor working conditions women face and their involvement in the Ethiopian labour movement's struggles. Constance Perrin-Joly's chapter on women and entrepreneurship reviews archival, quantitative and qualitative sources about women as entrepreneurs, pointing out the constraints on women's success in business and the challenges to their involvement in microcredit and in forming associations. The author calls for further research and case studies of successful businesswomen. The last chapter by Marina de Regt and Shimeles Bonsa Gulema reviews women's internal and international migration in the imperial, revolutionary, and EPRDF periods, revealing increasing trends and the internationalisation of women's migration. The authors call for a differentiated approach to understanding varied experiences and the consequences of women's migration and its impact on how they view themselves, their place in society and their relations with the state.

The seventh part consists of two chapters on women, family and education. The first one by Habtamu M. Tegegne on women, property and inheritance focuses on the mid-18th century to early 20th century. The author demonstrates that despite patriarchal societal norms, women had greater autonomy than is commonly assumed in owning and passing on property and especially land through inheritance, marriage, bequests, adoption and choosing heirs. The second chapter, by Pierre Guidi, reviews girls' and women's education from the end of the 19th century, through missionary and government schools, and the *Därg* mass education and literacy programmes. This contribution shows how schools can be vehicles for both reinforcing societal gender norms and increasingly questioning them to promote greater participation of women in the economy and society.

Part Eight addresses women and sports through two contributions. Benoit Gaudin's review of the rise of women athletes from the mid-20th century, points out the challenges and long struggles Ethiopian women athletes faced in the context of patriarchal gender norms to reach the Olympics and gain international and national recognition. The second contribution, by Tamirat Gebremariam follows on with three detailed biographies of women athletes:

Tsigie Gebre Mesih, Derartu Tulu and Merima Denboba, revealing the struggles and endurance through which they achieved success.

The final part consists of three chapters dealing with women, sexuality and reproductive health. The first, by Marie-Laure Derat and Rahwa M. Weldemichael, deals with female genital mutilation/cutting, outlining the historical background from medieval times to the 21st century, the current discourses and the medical and psychological impact. The authors conclude by reviewing changes in the practice and interventions by government and other actors. They suggest that the participation of girls and other relevant community stakeholders is necessary to end the practice. The second chapter, by Rahwa M. Weldemichael, addresses reproductive health, starting with an outline of the evolution of national reproductive health policies and strategies, and the challenges relating to maternal mortality, abortion, syphilis and HIV/AIDS, and especially child marriage and family planning. The author concludes by suggesting that integrated and decentralised primary health care has played a key role in addressing the challenge of prevailing gender norms and unequal gender relations, which still require further promotion of women's empowerment over reproductive health decision-making and more equitable gender relations. The last chapter, by Bethlehem Tekola, addresses women in prostitution, outlining the historical context from the 19th century and in urban centres in the 20th century, especially under the Italian occupation. She reviews more recent sociological and anthropological studies and argues for the perspectives based on the women's views.

* * *

I am most honoured and humbled to have been invited to write this foreword, especially given my family's involvement in feminism and studies of women in Ethiopia. My great grandmother Emeline was at the forefront of establishing the women's movement in the United Kingdom, with her daughters, at the beginning of the 20th century. My grandmother Sylvia became involved in supporting working women's struggles for emancipation in London. She went on to devote the rest of her life to joining the struggle against the Italian occupation of Ethiopia through her newspaper *New Times and Ethiopia News*, which was published for twenty years from 1936 and publicised the patriots' resistance. Having moved to Ethiopia in the last four years of her life, she published *Ethiopia Observer*, including 15 articles on women and a special issue on women in 1957 (vol. 1, no. 3). This included contributions by prominent Ethiopian women such as Sənəddu Gäbru (ሰንድዉ ገሰፋ), Mary Tadesse and Sophia Desta, as well as by Sylvia herself on three Ethiopian queens, the Ethiopian Women's Welfare Association and the Women's Vocational School.

My father, Richard Pankhurst, wrote about “women’s employment” in the same issue of *Ethiopia Observer*, and on “Women’s Life and Work” in a subsequent issue (vol. 1, no. 2). He compiled an *Anthology of Ethiopian Women in Former Times* (1976), and wrote an article on “The role of women in Ethiopian economic, social and cultural life” for the first National Conference of Ethiopian Studies (1990). While his *Economic History* (1968) does not have specific sections on women, the index has more than thirty entries on women. His *Social History* (1990) has sections on women in the medieval and Gondär periods and a section on women and gender relations in the 19th century. My mother, Rita Pankhurst, wrote about “Senedu Gabru: a Role Model For Ethiopian Women” in the book edited by Tsehai Berhane-Selassie entitled *Gender Issues in Ethiopia* (1990). She also wrote about “Ṭaytu’s Foremothers: Queens Āleni, Säblä Wängel and Bati Dəl Wämbära” for the 16th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies (2009). My sister Helen, carried out her PhD research on women in Northern Šäwa and wrote a book titled *Gender Development and Identity: an Ethiopian Study* (1992).

In conclusion, this compilation is a major achievement and a credit to the editor and contributors who deserve to be congratulated for this timely and useful work. It can be hoped that this will stimulate further work by the authors and others to expand on the topics raised and fill gaps in a wide range of subjects that have not been addressed, as the writers themselves point out. There is a need for further work by researchers to broaden the range of subject matters, historical periods and geographical areas covered. Finally, this work, which includes many male and foreign authors, will hopefully encourage more Ethiopian women to write about and reclaim their history.

The legacy of the Pankhurst Family on the history of Ethiopian women: a selected bibliography

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Margaux Herman

Preface

1. Background of the project

Over the past decade (2010s, Gregorian Calendar, or 2002-2012 EC), the Ethiopian authorities have demonstrated their commitment to the development of higher education by supporting the establishment of a large number of universities across the country. The aim of this project is to accompany this movement by providing tools and materials to ensure capacity building in higher education in the fields of history and gender studies.

This volume dedicated to the history of Ethiopian women is a pioneering project in Ethiopian educational documentation compiling the research that has been developed on the history of Ethiopian women up to the 2010s. D^r Margaux Herman initiated, coordinated and edited the volume. She began her career in Paris at La Sorbonne University then at Debre Berhan University as Assistant Professor. She is currently Assistant Professor at the *Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales (Inalco)* in Paris, France. She has brought together senior and early career Ethiopian and international scholars to produce a unique volume that aims to support the development of education and quality teaching at university level. It covers a wide range of topics related to women's issues in a historical perspective following critical, methodological and chronological approaches. The quality and expertise of the work produced is guaranteed both by the selection of the authors and by the scientific committee and board, composed of international researchers and professors in the field of Ethiopian Studies. This volume fills the existing gap in teaching materials in Social Sciences and Gender Studies Departments in Ethiopian universities that include a module on Ethiopian Women's History in their BA curriculum. It provides a compulsory tool that does not yet exist for both lecturers and students in Ethiopian universities or abroad.

Renowned scholars and academically recognised authorities in the field of Ethiopian history and women studies are part of the project. Professor Bahru Zewde, a pillar of social and economic history and a figure in Ethiopian studies and academia, has written a chapter, and D^r Alula Pankhurst, a prominent social anthropologist, active consultant in social development and currently Country Director of *Young Lives* has written the foreword. Nineteen researchers worked on the project in all its political, religious and social dimensions, exploring women's issues related to religion, work, education, political and economic participation, health, sports etc. Each theme has its

own dedicated section (called hereafter “Part”), made up successive chapters that either attempt to cover the period from antiquity to the present day, or to analyse different sub-themes.

The French Centre for Ethiopian Studies (*Centre français des études éthiopiennes*, UAR 3137), the only permanent foreign research centre in Ethiopia, attached to the French Embassy and the French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS), hosted and sponsored the project as part of its “Women and Gender in the Horn of Africa” programme, in partnership with the Centre for Gender Studies at Addis Ababa University. The African Worlds Institute (IMAF, *Institut des mondes africains* – UMR 8171) based in Paris, a joint interdisciplinary research institute for studying the African continent and its diaspora communities, also sponsored this project.

2. Reading guidelines: description and objectives

This volume aims to strengthen the teaching of the history of Ethiopian women and gender studies by providing reference materials. It is most needed because history was first written by men. Furthermore, history has not only been written by men, but it has also been approached from a male perspective, and told with men as the main actors (be they kings, high officers, traders, craftsmen, writers etc.) while women have been kept in the shadows. If this statement is true all over the world, it seems to be particularly true in Ethiopia considering the early stage of development of women’s history in Ethiopian academic studies. However, with the exception of famous elite queens such as Ḍleni, Säblä Wangel, Məntəwwab and Ṭaytu, Ethiopian women have always been hidden actors in the country’s history, and they deserve to be more visible today, and that we teach and remember their achievements, status and role in Ethiopian society in a long-term perspective.

This volume brings together historians and social scientists, both from Ethiopia and abroad, who share a common interest in developing the field of women’s history and gender in Ethiopia. They have worked together in order to address various methodological issues and topics in a single scholarly volume. This project aims to help both teachers and students. It provides the necessary scientific basis and methodological tools for understanding the role of women in Ethiopian society.

This book examines the main aspects of historical research on women in the Ethiopian context, from the past to the present, with the aim of being used in an academic context as reference material. Some themes have not been included in the volume either because they are still untouched, because they have not been treated in a historical perspective, or because the authors were not available. For example, the theme of peasantry and agriculture only appears in the margins of this volume, even though James McCann and Dessalegn Rahmato deal with women in their works. Some chapters, especially those

dedicated to contemporary issues could only provide a historical approach by drawing on the chronology of their institutional implementation. The volume includes both the primary sources highlighted in specific headings used by researchers studying Ethiopian women's history and the few available secondary sources, i.e., historical literature, that contain such research or deal with the subject of Ethiopian women's history. Finally, it highlights the challenges faced by historians working on women's history. The main aim of this volume is to encourage students to continue their training and research careers in this still developing field of study, by highlighting the various opportunities available.

3. Editor's note on references, footnotes, and style: a pedagogical choice

As this is a volume aimed primarily at students as reference material, the editor asked the authors to select only up to fifteen main references in English or Amharic. They are located in the bibliography of each chapter under a specific heading called "References and further readings." In fact, the selected references quote sources in other languages for further reading. However, some authors, especially on the contemporary period, had to propose longer lists of references in order to be able to cite all their sources, as their research is based on many official reports that have not yet been compiled in other previous works.

Authors were also asked not to use footnotes, but to include their reference works at the end of each chapter under the heading "References and further readings." Though unconventional in historical works, the editor's choice might be controversial as history is based on evidence. In conventional history books, each statement is accompanied by a footnote to give scientific value to the research and to allow readers to check the information provided. The editor's choice is based on a pedagogical purpose: to motivate students to read the reference works listed under the dedicated headings. Lecturers are invited to organise classroom activities for each chapter, asking students to find out where each piece of information comes from. A second activity could be to use the footnotes of each referenced article to find out which primary source the author based his or her work on. These two activities will help students to learn how to search for information in both primary and secondary sources as well as to understand the difference between these two types of sources. It will encourage students to read academic articles, to search for them in libraries and to understand the different uses of footnotes and citations.

Finally, the editor asked the authors to select different types of primary sources used to conduct research on women that differs depending on the time period, topic and disciplinary approach. These are highlighted in dedicated sections. They are fully referenced but neither included in the general bibliography nor in "References and further readings". Lecturers are invited

to organise classroom activities on the different types of sources that are available to historians and social scientists for their research, depending on the period under study: different types of written documentation, archaeology, iconography, images, material documentation, oral testimonies etc.

4. Brief description

This volume deals with the history of Ethiopian women from the past to the present. It is the first attempt of its kind to propose a scientific and academic overview of Ethiopian women's history. It presents the different studies that have been carried out in this field of knowledge with chapters that synthesise previous research, present the state of the art of thematic studies or propose original research, as it is the case with the chapters written by Habtamu M. Tegegne, Derese Ayenachew, Marina De Regt, Thomas Osmond, Shimeles Bonsa Gulema and Samuel Andreas Admasie. However, all the authors have proposed original approaches and synthesis of their subjects. The book offers a history of the social, political and material conditions of Ethiopian women in different situations. It highlights the contribution of women to Ethiopian history and society in a long-term perspective. Each part (nine in total) has been designed to cover a specific topic, to follow a chronological order within or with successive chapters and to integrate as much as possible the diversity of the Ethiopian population. This volume can be a useful resource not only for teaching Ethiopian women's history, but also for other social science programs dealing with the Ethiopian context, the African continent or for comparative studies.

5. Objectives for lecturers

This volume will help lecturers to:

- Prepare their own course and syllabus according to their needs while having a variety of topics and historical periods on which to base their teaching.
- Have scientifically based material and a general volume that they can present to their students as the main support for their teaching.
- Motivate students to read academic articles and books by organising classroom activities and research essays on a variety of topics.
- Identify and work with primary sources according to the period and subject.
- Prepare their students for graduate programs in Ethiopian women's history.
- Highlight the possibility of continuing their academic training in Ethiopian women's history and gender studies.

6. Objectives for students

This volume will help students to:

- Appreciate the achievements of Ethiopian women in history.
- Identify different women who have influenced Ethiopian history and know their role in the social, political and economic history of the country.
- Categorise sources for the study of Ethiopian women's history.
- Discuss the deep-rooted elements of family structure and traditions that can be linked to the neglect and violence inflicted on girls and women in Ethiopian history.
- Respect human rights in general, value a just society and reject what remains of the dominant male mindset in order to find a state of balance in the whole process of educating girls.
- Recognise the social, economic and political participation of the Ethiopian women, and to pay attention to their present and future role in society.
- Understand the values of interdisciplinary studies

Glossary

abeto: prince; title given to the male member of the royal family.

aläqa: chief, superior, supervisor of a church.

aläqanät: system of inheritance and family leadership or seniority.

amīr: commander, governor, prince.

anchoress (f.), anchorite (m.): religious recluse who withdraws from the secular world, living at the same place in a cell, a hole in a tree or similar hiding places.

andämta: interpretations of theological texts. The Ethiopian exegesis analyses the Bible, the writings of the Church Fathers (patristic texts), liturgical books, dogmatical and canonical writings and monastic texts. The *andämta* is subject of the highest branch of the traditional church school system and is mostly transmitted orally.

baḥtawiyan: (Gəʿəz), *solitaries*; nuns or monks, living alone in the nature.

bidaa: ‘innovation’ in religious matters.

Church Fathers: Christian theologians and authors (living until the 7th century), setting the theological foundation of the Church.

cenobitic: monastic tradition of living together, a model established by St. Pachomius (d. 346). In Ethiopia different models of religious life were developed for nuns and monks.

daḡḡač/däḡḡazmač: (Gəʿəz), “commander of the gate,” a politico-military title below *ras**.

denomination: Christian confession or movement.

dīkr: “mentioning”, devotional Muslim prayers.

Ämäytə: title given to a princess or a female of high importance.

‘Änzira səbhat: (Gəʿəz), *the Lyre of Praise*; also called *Arganonä Wəddase*, a hymnological praise for Mary, the Mother of God (“*wäladitä amlak*”).

Ätege: (Gəʿəz), empress, a title designating the coronated spouse of an emperor. Some empresses acted as regents using this title after the death of their husbands.

Ewostateans: (Gəʿəz), followers of the doctrine of the monk Ewostatewos (b.ca. 1273, d.ca. 1352). He preached the observance of the Sabbath (Saturday and Sunday) and he disobeyed the Coptic metropolitan.

faqīh: Islamic jurist.

fitawrari: (Gəʿəz), commander of the vanguard, a title below *däḡḡazmač**.

gädl: (Gəʿəz), *spiritual combat*, acts; Life; a hagiography of a saint. The *gädl* was in most cases written shortly after one’s death. It describes the life of

the saint, including spiritual aspects and miracles. The *gädl* usually includes the *ḳidan*, a pact between the holy women or men and Jesus, like that of Mary with her son (*Kidanä Məhrät*, Covenant of Mercy).

gendering research: a research concept to examine complex systems like religions about whether they have a certain female or male ideal and/or whether they transmit it. Furthermore, the impact of today's role models on the interpretation of the past is taken into consideration.

Haymanotä Abäw: (Gə'əz), *Faith of the Fathers*; collection of theological texts, writings of the Church Fathers.

Hohatä Barhan: (Gə'əz), *Gate of the light*; a Marian hymnological composition. It contains praises addressed to Mary, but also hints at the theological discussions of the 15th century.

imam: worship leader of a Muslim community or of a mosque.

indigenisation: a term describing the process of making something more native.

kabīr: "great", honorific title referred to a learned and respected person.

Kəbrä Nəgäšt: (Gə'əz), *Glory of the Kings*; early 14th century, Ethiopic book about the Solomonic dynasty, the visit of the Queen of Sheba to Solomon and the Ark of the Covenant brought by Mənilək to Ethiopia.

koso: tree, the dried female flowers are a medicine against tapeworm.

liqāmäk^was: official serving as the king's double to divert attacks directed against the king.

maḥbār: (Gə'əz), association of believers with devotion to a specific saint. They gather monthly on the commemoration date (*täzḳar*; *zəḳr*). Each *maḥbār* finances itself and uses the money for church feasts and social activities.

Mälkä'a Maryam: (Gə'əz), *image, portrait, effigy of Mary*; hymnological composition to praise the body of Mary.

martyr: believers, who gave their life for the Christian faith.

Məshafä Sənkəssar: (Gə'əz), *Book of Religious Service*; *Synaxarium*, hagiographic collection of short descriptions of the lives of the saints, listed under the death day of the saint in calendric order. The canonisation of saints stopped with the completion of the *Synaxarium* (17th century). The book is a relevant source, not only concerning the given biographical, geographical and historical information, but also about what is not mentioned. An example may be that in contrast to the *gädl* of the male saints the temptations of the human nature are not reported in the lives of the female saints. Lit.: Budge, E. A. Wallis, *The Book of the Saints of the Ethiopian Church*, 1928, reprint 1976. Available in the internet http://www.stmichaeloc.org/The_Ethiopian_Synaxarium.pdf

mäsqäl [Cross], 27 September (17 Mäskäräm): (Gə'əz), a church feast celebrating the exaltation of the True Cross. The EOTC possesses a relic of the

True Cross (Amba Gəšän) and commemorates the arrival on that day, in close connection with the finding of the True Cross by Empress Helena, the mother of Emperor Constantine. Processions come together on a large place and light a bonfire (*dämära*).

Mäzgäbä Haymanot: (Gə‘əz), *Treasure of Faith*; treatise on the faith of the EOTC, mainly discussing the Trinity and the nature of Jesus and Mary.

Nägärä Maryam: (Gə‘əz), *story of Mary*; Ethiopic book, reporting on the flight of Mary from Herod. In some manuscripts, it is called *Gädlä Maryam*.

qāḏī: Islamic judge.

Qəbat: (Gə‘əz), *ointment*; a term for a Christological doctrine, the adherents of this doctrine opposed the *Tāwahədo*.

qəne: to sing a hymn; a hymn praising God and the saints, occasionally officials or events can be honoured. Characteristically, the hymn is composed spontaneously and used only once.

ras: *head*, the highest traditional title next to *negus*.

rim: lands distributed on behalf of churches by church founders and grantors, appellation for church holdings. (multifaceted term see Bairu Tafla, *Notion of rim*, https://www.academia.edu/6207900/Rim_-_Notion_of)

shaykh: noble title.

sufi: *Islamic mystic*.

Tä‘ammərä Maryam: (Gə‘əz), *Miracles of Mary*; Ethiopian collections about the miracles of Mary.

tabot: (Gə‘əz), a sacred portable altar tablet and altar chest, referring to the Ark of Covenant, containing the Tablets of the Law (Moses). The consecrated *tabot* of each church has an inscription with the name of the saint, to whom the *tabot* is dedicated.

Tāwahədo: (Gə‘əz), *be one, united with each other*; a theological term to state the union of the divinity with the humanity after the Incarnation. The term is part of the name of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tāwahədo Church – *Yä‘ityopya Ortodoks Tāwahədo Betä Krəstiyan*.

wäyzäro: (Gə‘əz), “lady,” title given to a princess of the royal family.

Transliteration table for Ge‘ez script

Source: Siegbert Uhlig, et al., eds. *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica, vol. 1: A-C* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2003), xx-xi.

1st order		2nd order		3rd order		4th order		5th order		6th order		7th order	
ሀ	ha	ሁ	hu	ሂ	hi	ሃ	ha	ሄ	he	ህ	hə	ሆ	ho
ለ	lä	ሉ	lu	ሊ	li	ላ	la	ሌ	le	ል	lə	ሎ	lo
ሐ	ḥa	ሑ	ḥu	ሒ	ḥi	ሓ	ḥa	ሔ	ḥe	ሐ	ḥə	ሐ	ḥo
መ	mä	ሙ	mu	ሚ	mi	ማ	ma	ሜ	me	ም	mə	ሞ	mo
ሠ	śä	ሡ	śu	ሢ	śi	ሣ	śa	ሤ	śe	ሥ	śə	ሦ	śo
ረ	rä	ሩ	ru	ሪ	ri	ራ	ra	ራ	re	ር	rə	ሮ	ro
ሰ	sä	ሱ	su	ሲ	si	ሳ	sa	ሴ	se	ሰ	sə	ሶ	so
ሸ	šä	ሹ	šu	ሺ	ši	ሻ	ša	ሼ	še	ሽ	šə	ሾ	šo
ቀ	qä	ቁ	qu	ቂ	qi	ቃ	qa	ቄ	qe	ቅ	qə	ቆ	qo
በ	ፈ	ቡ	ፈu	ቢ	ፈi	ባ	ፈa	ቤ	ፈe	ብ	ፈə	ቦ	ፈo
ቨ	bä	ቩ	bu	ቪ	bi	ቫ	ba	ቮ	be	ቭ	bə	ቮ	bo
ተ	tä	ቱ	tu	ቲ	ti	ታ	ta	ቲ	te	ት	tə	ቶ	to
ቸ	čä	ቹ	ču	ቺ	či	ቻ	ča	ቼ	če	ች	čə	ቻ	čo
ኀ	ḥa	ኁ	ḥu	ኂ	ḥi	ኃ	ḥa	ኄ	ḥe	ኅ	ḥə	ኆ	ḥo
ነ	nä	ኑ	nu	ኒ	ni	ና	na	ኔ	ne	ን	nə	ኖ	no
ኘ	nä	ኙ	nū	ኚ	nī	ኝ	nā	ኞ	nē	ኞ	nə	ኞ	nō
አ	’a	ኡ	’u	ኢ	’i	ኣ	’a	ኤ	’e	አ	’ə	ኦ	’o
ከ	kä	ኩ	ku	ኪ	ki	ካ	ka	ኬ	ke	ክ	kə	ኮ	ko
ኸ	kä	ኹ	ku	ኺ	ki	ኻ	ka	ኼ	ke	ኽ	kə	ኾ	ko
ወ	wä	ዉ	wu	ዐ	wi	ዑ	wa	ዒ	we	ወ	wə	ዐ	wo
ዐ	‘a	ዑ	‘u	ዒ	‘i	ዓ	‘a	ዔ	‘e	ዐ	‘ə	ዒ	‘o
ዘ	zä	ዙ	zu	ዚ	zi	ዛ	za	ዞ	ze	ዘ	zə	ዞ	zo
ዠ	žä	ዡ	žu	ዢ	ži	ዣ	ža	ዤ	že	ዠ	žə	ዡ	žo
የ	yä	ዩ	yu	ዪ	yi	ያ	ya	ዬ	ye	ይ	yə	ዮ	yo
ደ	dä	ዱ	du	ዲ	di	ዳ	da	ዴ	de	ድ	də	ዶ	do
ጀ	ğä	ጁ	ጅu	ጂ	ጅi	ጃ	ጅa	ጄ	ጅe	ጅ	ጅə	ጆ	ጅo
ገ	gä	ጉ	gu	ጊ	gi	ጋ	ga	ጌ	ge	ግ	gə	ገ	go

1st order		2nd order		3rd order		4th order		5th order		6th order		7th order	
ጠ	ṭä	ጡ	ṭu	ጢ	ṭi	ጣ	ṭa	ጤ	ṭe	ጥ	ṭə	ጦ	ṭo
ጨ	čä	ጨ	ču	ጨ	či	ጨ	ča	ጨ	če	ጨ	čə	ጨ	čo
ጸ	pä	ጸ	pu	ጸ	pi	ጸ	pa	ጸ	pe	ጸ	pə	ጸ	po
ጸ	šä	ጸ	šu	ጸ	ši	ጸ	ša	ጸ	še	ጸ	šə	ጸ	šo
ፀ	šä	ፀ	šu	ፀ	ši	ፀ	ša	ፀ	še	ፀ	šə	ፀ	šo
ፈ	fä	ፈ	fu	ፈ	fi	ፈ	fa	ፈ	fe	ፈ	fə	ፈ	fo
ፐ	pä	ፐ	pu	ፐ	pi	ፐ	pa	ፐ	pe	ፐ	pə	ፐ	po
ፕ	vä	ፕ	vu	ፕ	vi	ፕ	va	ፕ	ve	ፕ	və	ፕ	vo

Labiovelars*

ቂ	q ^w ä	ቃ	q ^w i	ቄ	q ^w a	ቅ	q ^w e	ቆ	q ^w ə
ቇ	ḥ ^w ä	ቈ	ḥ ^w i	቉	ḥ ^w a	ቊ	ḥ ^w e	ቋ	ḥ ^w ə
ከ	k ^w ä	ከ	k ^w i	ከ	k ^w a	ከ	k ^w e	ከ	k ^w ə
ገ	g ^w ä	ገ	g ^w i	ገ	g ^w a	ገ	g ^w e	ገ	g ^w ə
ኸ	k ^w ä	ኸ	k ^w i	ኸ	k ^w a	ኸ	k ^w e	ኸ	k ^w ə
ቈ	q ^w ä	ቃ	q ^w i	ቄ	q ^w a	ቅ	q ^w e	ቆ	q ^w ə

* Consonant symbols with the additional ᵂ underneath (e.g., ቂ, l^wa, ቃ, b^wa, ቄ, t^wa etc.) or ᵃ above (e.g., ቅ, r^wa, ቆ, ᵃa) stand for the respective consonant phonemes followed by -^wa.

Numerals

፩	1	፪	8	፫	60
፬	2	፭	9	፮	70
፯	3	፰	10	፱	80
፲	4	፳	20	፺	90
፴	5	፵	30	፻	100
፶	6	፷	40	፺፻	1,000
፸	7	፹	50	፺፻፻	10,000

Part 1

Historiography and Methodology

Margaux Herman

Chapter 1

Who Wrote Ethiopian Women's History and how to Write it?

“Nowhere does the Abyssinian literature treat seriously of women. Women must rank very high among the neglected themes of Ethiopian historical and social studies.”

Donald Crummey (1981, 444)

The inclusion of women and gender in African historiography has been flourishing in recent decades. Before the 1970s, only few studies on African women's history were published; more often found in anthropological and ethnographic studies. From the 1980s, historians and social anthropologists have paid better attention to the reconstruction and analysis of the lives of ordinary people in society. Therefore, women and the issue of how gender relations have been transformed by various historical processes began to be studied. A significant number of monographs began to appear in the 1990s. However, in 2002, Belete Bizuneh noticed that this upheaval in African historiography does not seem to have affected historical scholarship about women in Ethiopia, an issue already noticed in 1981 by Donald Crummey. On reviewing historical and anthropological studies and topics conducted on women in Ethiopia, he concluded by stating that “in comparison, with other African countries the gap on women's studies remains significant.” Until today, only the works of Richard Pankhurst, especially *A Social History of Ethiopia*, mentions the activities of women over an extensive period of time. In this chapter, we will therefore present the historiography and the methodology related to the types of primary sources that could be used by scholars interested in the reconstruction of the history of Ethiopian women. The available sources fall into two broad categories: Ethiopian and foreign sources. What has to be underlined in women's studies is that the availability of sources influenced the type of research that could be done at first.

1. Historiography of the research conducted on women's history in Ethiopia

1.1. Belete Bizuneh's historiographic work on Ethiopian women's history

As Belete Bizuneh noticed in 2002, bibliographies can be used as one means of illustrating the lack of historical studies dedicated to women. Using a bibliography produced in 1994 in the *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, he noticed that out of a total of 494 papers published in the *Proceedings of the International Conference of Ethiopian Studies* (vols. 1–9 and 11), only 12 articles appeared in the index under “women”; the majority produced by anthropologists or sociologists and were ahistorical. They dealt with subjects such as women's reproductive health and their roles and participation in crafts, education, and voluntary associations. The same was true of the *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* itself. The author shows that out of 311 entries only three of them concerned women: “one dealt with elite marriage at the Ethiopian court in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the second described the position of Hadiya women in Southern Ethiopia, and the third was a review of a book about Empress Taytu.” He concluded by saying that, before the 1980s, only one journal seems to have taken an interest in women's studies, *The Ethiopia Observer*, a newspaper founded by a feminist, promoter of Ethiopian women: Sylvia Pankhurst (1882–1960), that replaced the famous *New Times* and *Ethiopian Times*. However, Belete Bizuneh (2002) noticed that articles “tended to be sketchy, focusing mainly on the activities of elite women or women in urban centres” and that “the methodology used was not sophisticated” for the authors did not indicate their sources. These articles were however pioneers in the genre and unfortunately, the death of Sylvia Pankhurst in 1960, only four years after the establishment of the journal, “seems to have resulted in a decline in interest in women.”

Belete Bizuneh also noticed, “the absence of institutions that direct and encourage research by students and scholars” on women and gender issues until the 2000s. The establishment of the Center for Research, Documentation, and Training on Women in Development (CERTWID) in 1990, and a new research grant for gender issues established by the Organization of Social Science Research for Eastern Africa (OSSREA), which is based in Addis Ababa, were promising signs for the future of the field. In his research, he regrets however that although some work on women, often outstanding, has been done as BA and MA theses at Addis Ababa University since the end of the 1990s, unfortunately, most of these works remain unpublished. Many references published before 2002 can be found in the article published in the same year by the author quoted in this chapter.

1.2. *Only few changes since 2002: a critical need to develop women's history in Ethiopia*

If we applied the same methodology as that used by Belete Bizuneh to review the progress of the research conducted in history on Ethiopian women, it is still remarkable that only a few works have been added since 2002 till almost the end of the 2010s. In 2002, T. Fernyhough and A. Fernyhough published a chapter dedicated to “Women, Gender History, and Imperial Ethiopia.” Margaux Herman is one of the few historians of medieval and modern times to have chosen “women” as the core subject of all her studies. She produced in 2020 a state of the art of the researches undertaken on women's history during the medieval times. Other scholars, like Anaïs Wion, Claire Bosc-Tiesse, or Habtamu M. Tegegne have given new insights into the history of women in the modern times while being interested in the historical approach of art history, diplomatic and properties documentation. Pierre Guidi, another historian, also published in the last decades studies on women and education from the 1950s up to 1991.

In the online catalogue of Addis Ababa University consulted in 2018, only 18 master's theses are specifically dedicated to women according to their titles. However, none of them were defended in the History Department, a fact that suggests that historians still neglect women as a topic worthy of study. In the bibliography drawn up by Jon Abbink, “The Anthropology of Ethiopia 1999–2011,” only eight entries contained the word “women” in their titles. In the annual “Ethiopia Bibliography” or “Bibliography” published in *the International Journal of Ethiopian Studies* from 2005 to 2012, one theme is dedicated to “Women and Children” and had a total of 58 articles including the term “women” in their title while only five were historical works. In 2012, a specific theme on gender was added with four entries (one being placed in anthropological works). Browsing the work of Jon Abbink “Ethiopian-Eritrean Studies, a Bibliography on Society and History: 2010–2015,” studies using the word “women” in their title numbered 67 entries out of more than 700 entries, and among these, ten articles added a historical approach to their studies. In this bibliography, there are no specific themes dedicated to women and in the index only “refugee women” and “artist women” are specified. In “Ethiopian-Eritrean Studies, a Bibliography on Society and History: 2016–2022,” compiled by the same author, there are no specific entries dedicated to women or gender issues, and in the history section only 23 out of 630 articles deal with women or gender. Of these, 6 were written by contributors of this volume (four by M. Herman and two by S. Bruzzi) and 10 others are related to migrant communities. In the other sections, 130 articles focus on women or gender. The gap in historical studies dedicated to women still needs to be filled. Women's history is dealt with in various types of sources or historical works, but has not yet been the subject of in-depth studies in its own right. Progress

is being made and more articles and essays have been published since 2018, although few in the field of history.

2. Using Ethiopian primary sources for reconstructing Ethiopian women's history

2.1. *Ethiopian written sources*

For medieval and post-medieval studies, besides biblical, liturgical and hagiographical texts, royal chronicles are the oldest of the Ethiopian written sources that are at the disposal of scholars engaged in the study of Ethiopian history. By their very nature, the chronicles, which are the works of priests constructed under the control of the kings, tend to be androcentric. Women principally appear only in connection with marriage alliances or in their involvement in court intrigues; they also appear as sponsors of foundations, religious movements or as regents.

It is also important, as Donald Crummey showed, later followed by Habtamu M. Tegegne, to focus attention on the marginalia of the churches' manuscripts whose contents include useful information on land properties, marriages, adoptions, inheritances and donations. It is helpful in drawing genealogies of the local community where women were and became important characters. On another level, as noticed by S. Kaplan and more recently by Mersha Alehegne, hagiographies also give a good insight into women's position in society. Though few studies have been undertaken into a careful reading of this type of religious text, they contain some data on the daily life of women, from the commoners to the elites. Some of the rare pieces of research undertaken have for instance showed that one of the concerns of medieval women was the problem of infertility as a major health issue.

For contemporaneous history, newspapers are by far one of the most important categories of written sources, indispensable in the reconstruction of women and gender history. Although newspaper production goes back to the early decades of the 20th century, the most useful would be those published since 1941. One of these papers, *Addis Zāmān* (አዲስ ዘመን; "New Era" in English), for example, has appeared regularly since 1941-42, and, at times, has contained biographies of prominent women as those who participated in the patriotic resistance against Italian rule. *Addis Zāmān* and other newspapers carried writings by men and women regarding various issues such as marriage, women's liberation, debates over "proper" and "improper" dress, the hardship of prostitutes, advertisements, etc. These newspapers helped in understanding the popular perceptions about gender relations, as well as the changes that occurred over time.

The second type of source, but equally useful, are the private and state archives. They are difficult to access and use. They are kept in different places, they are mostly not well catalogued, or organised, and their state of

preservation is usually not good. Hopefully, digitisation will facilitate their access in the near future. For example, the digitisation project “African Worker on file” lead by the International Institute of Social History based in Amsterdam and involving Ethiopian partners will allow scholars to draw promising research on the archives of the Confederation of Ethiopian Trade Unions (CETU). However, research will depend highly on the catalogue that accompanies the archives to render their use more accessible. The study of the legal system and customary laws is also fruitful in approaching the position of women in the society. In that sense, the work of Helen Pankhurst in 1992 is one of the rarest providing an analysis of the impact of the state policies defining state-peasantry relations and their effects on gender relations.

2.2. Ethiopian oral sources

Women's life histories and the biographical approach with the use of oral testimony help to fill lacunae in published sources; however, one shall notice that this has limitations in researching earlier periods. On the medieval and post-medieval periods, scholars can retrieve genealogies and compare them to written sources, if available. From folktales and stories, researchers can gather information on marriage, kinship, and social expectations regarding women's behaviour, as such issues are discussed in allegorical forms. The researcher would have to be careful, as folktales might appear timeless but in fact they change over time, depending on the people who tell them or to whom the story was told. However, they still reflect the cultural ideas and customs of the time and area in which they are recited.

For the recent past, especially for the study of both elites and ordinary women, oral sources are valuable as showcased by the biographical interview of Zenebework Tadesse in 2013 or in the work of Marta Camilla Wright on nuns. Oral traditions, personal and family histories both at regional and local levels offer priceless information. The works of Anne Cassiers is in that sense fruitful. Nevertheless, conducting interviews or recording oral history should follow a strict methodological approach in order to be used properly and reduce the bias for analysing them. All researchers should be prepared in advance and make a good balance between the good and bad aspects of all challenging questions before, during and after conducting the interview: maintaining the informant's privacy, sharing the researcher's own comparable information, hiring an interpreter from the local area, the problems of language and translation, the choice of interviewee, the balance between asking questions and free-form stories, the payment (or not) of the people interviewed, the issue of gender (of both the researcher and the interviewees), the need to create a space for women to talk freely in case of male intrusion, etc. Moreover, women and men have different stories to tell because their own experiences may differ according to gender: they may not

remember or experience events (e.g. weddings, work, wars) in the same way, whether inside or outside the domestic sphere. As well, the level of education of the women may also have consequences on the amount of data collected.

Proverbs, sayings, poems, and songs that are performed at various occasions such as births, weddings, and funerals are another substantial source of data. For example, Eyayu Lulseged, quoted in Belete Bizuneh's article, has used contemporary Amharic songs from the 1950s to 1970s "to show popular perceptions and views regarding social, economic, and political processes in the country." Considering the majority of the rural population continues to be illiterate, it is of particular importance. Scholars, however, must use a strict methodology when using them, identifying authorship and periodising the tradition. Scholars can also use historical linguistics to examine changing patterns in women's roles.

2.3. Archaeology and material culture and techniques

Combining the traditional research method of a close reading of textual documents with the study of the architecture of homes and communities can be fruitful for history. This combined approach has been proven for the study of the history of women in European, American and African contexts as well. Archaeological evidence is also a way to understand the division of labour in early societies, though evidence collected through archaeological research does not prove that women or men did particular work, but only provides a basis for analysis. Nevertheless, archaeologists can help retrieve some of that earlier history. Items such as pots, jewelry, and other material goods can provide evidence about women's activities in earlier historical periods. The study of craftsmanship, such as weaving techniques, is also useful in terms of approach: noting for example evolutions in designs and techniques can also reveal interesting data in a long-term perspective. In other African countries, the study of tattoo designs, the evolution in fashion, the location on women's bodies and the physical space they inhabited have been used as historical "documents." Finally, both the production of art and the representation of women in artistic images can also add to our knowledge of women's roles in history, but have been barely studied.

2.4. Foreign sources

A variety of foreign sources are available for the historian interested in gender relations and women's studies in Ethiopia. Accounts by travellers, missionaries, and diplomats are accessible from the Middle Ages up to today, especially flourishing from the last quarter of the 19th century. However, a specific methodological approach has to be used as many of the authors resided in the country for only a short period of time, and therefore their accounts tend to lack details and be ethnocentric. Many of them had few

direct interactions with local people due to language barriers, were restricted only to the court or concentrated on the northern and central parts of the country. Despite these limitations, foreigners described what they saw and sometimes customs, events or details that were too common to be mentioned in local sources. Therefore, if interpretations of what they witnessed must be used cautiously, their accounts described various issues related to the life of women in the country. Belete Bizuneh highlighted in his article some of the travellers' accounts to be used; such as Nathaniel Pearce, Mansfield Parkyns, and the D'Abbadie brothers; as they stayed in the country for longer periods and learned to speak the local languages. He especially recommended to have a look at the work of Augustus Wylde for he had "a keen eye for gender relations, (...) visited northern Ethiopia a number of times in the 1880s and 1890s, described women's household and agricultural activity, the dress and jewellery of various classes of men and women, and the life of children and childrearing." Belete Bizuneh also pointed out the necessity to search for information in female travellers' accounts when studying issues relating to women. In the late 1980s, Yvonne Knibiehler and Régine Goutalier, quoted by K. Sheldon, recognised that "sources from European women are very different from male sources." For the Ethiopian case, the work of Rosita Forbes, a British woman who travelled on a mule from Dire Dawa to northwestern Ethiopia and thence to Massawa can be mentioned.

According to Belete Bizuneh "in the post-Italian period, the number of travel accounts with ethnological information seems to have declined." However, he recommended to have a look at works written by expatriates who worked in Ethiopia, providing the example of David Talbot who was interested in the "changing attitudes toward marriage, beauty, and work in the capital city." Foreign sources also include archives (diplomatic mainly) and newspapers such as *Life Magazine*. Finally, reports of the international organisations can also be used to define issues concerning women and their evolution through time since the 1990s.

Conclusion

The various methodologies and sources used for each chapter illustrate the core ideas developed here. It is now urgent to focus historical studies on women as this topic affects all the chronological periods from ancient times till today. This volume is in fact showcasing the advancing of the topic and aims to motivate the young generation to do more research by showing the variety of this developing field. The main updated works dedicated to women's history are referenced (up to the 2010s). Other references, less historically oriented, but cited in this volume may help to uncover their history and showcase the methodology to be used. It is also important to emphasize that gendered histories can help us comprehend not only women's experiences but also

the history of society in general. As development studies and development programs focusing on women expand, they need historical backgrounds in order to adapt their projects to Ethiopia and its women.

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Part 2

Women and Myths of Foundation

Chapter 2

Women and Myths of Foundation

“Creation myths are not about the origins of the world at all, but about the origins of patriarchy which claimed itself as the world.”

Caputi (1987, 9).

This part is focused on the “great” women, mythical or historical figures who shaped the identity of the country. Indeed, myths are part of any nation’s history. Most societies recognise their mythical ancestor to be a woman. Myths are made to be remembered, but they also change and follow the course of history in being adapted to new political or social realities. Studying the relationship between women and myths in Ethiopia reveals many aspects of the society, especially regarding women’s conditions, role, and place in the country.

1. “The first Ethiopian is a woman”: Lucy

The *National Museum* in Addis Ababa exhibits the fragmentary plaster representation of a hominin discovered in the Hadar region in 1974. This is “Lucy,” a three-million-year-old fossil skeleton of an *Australopithecus afarensis* regarded as one of the earliest human ancestors. In Ethiopia, she is known as Dənqənāš (Amharic for “you are amazing” or “you are lovely”). “Lucy” represents a starting point for the Ethiopian cultural narrative alongside the story of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. The idea of having the “first human” strengthens national self-confidence. Lucy is a centralising force, neither claimed as Amhara, Tigrean, Oromo, Harari, etc.: she is resolutely Ethiopian.

Source 1. Ethiopia, the cradle of mankind

“Ethiopia is the cradle of mankind [Lucy], the birthplace of coffee, and the purported resting place of the Ark of the Covenant [Makōdda’s legend]”

“Five million years in the cradle of mankind,” *USA Today Magazine* 136, no. 2757 (June 2008), <https://law-journals-books.vlex.com/vid/five-million-years-in-cradle-mankind-55440147> [archive].



Figure 1. Cast of “Lucy” at the National Museum of Ethiopia (Addis Ababa-Ethiopia)

2. Queen Makədda, the mother of Christian Ethiopians

It is recorded in 1 Kings 10 that the Queen of Sheba visited Solomon of Israel around the 10th century BCE. The Ethiopian version of this tale, written in the *Kəbrä Nəgəšt* (*the Glory of the Kings*), recounts the travel of the Queen (Sheba), known only in this text as Makədda, to King Solomon. While some nations treated this story as a minor theme in the corpus of biblical legends, not so for the Ethiopians. Although the *Kəbrä Nəgəšt* cannot provide historical proof of the existence of the Queen Makədda, this text and its use down to the present day underline the importance of the queen as a founding figure of the Ethiopian Christianity and statehood.

Source 2. Queen of Sheba, mother of the Ethiopian Christian Monarchy

“The Imperial dignity shall remain perpetually attached to the line of Ḥaylā Šəllase I, whose line descends without interruption from the dynasty of Mənəlik I, son of the Queen of Ethiopia, the Queen of Sheba, and King Solomon of Jerusalem.”

Ethiopian Constitution, art. 2 (revised 1955), <https://chilot.files.wordpress.com/2011/04/1955-revised-constitution-of-ethiopia1.pdf> [archive]

2.1. *Makədda and the Ethiopian Christian kingdom's identity*

Under the reign of ‘Amdä Šəyon (1314–1344), a final version of the *Kəbrä Nəgäšt* was written and translated in Ge‘ez. Reworked and used as a politico-ideological charter, it became the founding myth of the so-called Solomonic royal house and people, described as the new people elected by God. Makədda is therefore considered the “historical” mother of all Christian Ethiopians, through her relations with King Solomon and the birth of Mənəlik I, the first King of Ethiopia. It also implies that, before, the country was “pagan” and ruled by women. This myth however ended the possibility for women to inherit the throne and legitimised a male succession line.

Source 3. Makədda, the oath of the nobles and the evolution of the dynastic rule

“And the Queen said unto her nobles: ‘Speak ye now, and swear ye by the heavenly Zion that ye will not make women queens or set them upon the throne of the kingdom of Ethiopia, and that no one except the male seed of David, the son of Solomon the King, shall ever reign over Ethiopia, and that ye will never make women queens.’ And all the nobles of the king’s house swore, and the governors, and the councillors, and the administrators.”

Wallis Budge, E.A., *The Queen of Sheba and Her Only Son Menyelek (Kəbrä Nəgäšt)* (Ontario: Parentheses Publications, Ethiopian Series Cambridge, 2000 [1928, 1st ed.]), ch. 87.

2.2. *The descendants of Makədda’s servant and Solomon*

Some traditions have developed that the servant of Makədda also came back from Jerusalem bearing a son of Solomon. These traditions are sometimes applied to the Zag^we Kings, who ruled the country from the Lasta region in Wällo during the 11th to the 13th century, sometimes to the Betä ʿƏsra’el communities, sometimes to other communities of Ethiopia. However, these versions of the Makədda-Solomon myth could not have been initiated by either of these actors as they enhance a descent from Solomon through a servant, that is to say a minor line.

It should therefore be noted that while the Zag^we considered themselves the legitimate rulers, they were considered “usurpers” from a Solomonic point of view. Consequently, these traditions are most probably a later development put in place by the Solomonic Kings themselves, trying to reconsider the great achievements of some of the Zag^we Kings, such as King Lalibäla, or to include to some extent the Betä ʿƏsra’el in a common history.

2.3. *The revival, rewriting and diffusion of the Queen Makədda and Solomon myth at the end of the 19th century*

During the latter part of the 19th century, on the order of Mənəlik II (r. 1889–1913), regional histories were written throughout the country in order

Source 4. King Solomon, the Zag^we Kings and the “Falashas”

“Besides taking the Queen of Sheba into his bed King Solomon, [he] also worked his will on her servant who bore him a son called Zag^we. In due course, Zag^we founded his own dynasty and his half-brother Menelik provided him with members of a bodyguard whom he had brought from Israel and they spread into the provinces of Wollo, Gojjam and Shoa, where they became the ancestors of the ‘Falasha.’”

Kessler, David, *The Falashas: The Forgotten Jews of Ethiopia* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1982), 81–82.

Another version, almost similar had been collected by Arnaud d’Abbadie in the 19th century. In it, the son of the servant is called “Zogo,” a probable deformation of Zag^we.

to create a sense of unity in mixed Ethiopian populations for the sake of maintaining state independence. The *Chronicle of Mənəlik II*, whose name has not been chosen by chance, opens with an extended claim to Solomonic dynasty legitimacy, using a retelling of the founding legend, the union of Solomon and Sheba. He is the namesake of their legendary son Mənəlik I. For better dissemination, his chronicle and regional chronicles were written in Amharic. In the first, Mənəlik is called *nəguṣä nəgäšt* (“King of Kings”) while in the latter, the regional leader assumed the title of *nəguṣ* (“King”), legitimised by their linkage to King Solomon. For example, the *Chronicle of Goğğam*, written by *alāqa* Täklä Iyasus at the beginning of the 20th century, recounts the history of the first settlers in the region being the offspring of Makədda’s sister, Šəḥay Nəgädä, who was also a child of King Solomon (called May Zag^wa). From that point on, the rulers of Goğğam were, accepted as descending from this line. The genealogy ends by giving legitimacy to King Täklä Haymanot over both Goğğam and Kāfa regions. The genealogy provides the legitimacy to the *nəguṣ* of the region to rule under the leadership of the *nəguṣä nəgäšt*. Other traditions, like the late version of the *Kəbrä Nəgäšt* found in Z^way by Mənəlik II, enhance the first regional kings as being those who accompanied Mənəlik I when he came back from Israel and whom he appointed as *nəguṣ* all over the country (see Source 5). As well, other late Tigrean traditions, collected by Johannes Kolmodin, enhance the roles of the children of Zagua, Mənəlik I’s brother born to the servant of Saba. Called Isra’elites (Ruben, Simeon, Minab, Juda, Levi...), they accompanied Mənəlik I to Ethiopia and became the first regional kings.

2.4. Makədda and the Betä Āsra’el communities

Before the 15th century, there is no solid evidence of the existence of the Betä Āsra’el communities (so-called “Falaša”). It is also important to note that, since the 20th century and the movements of the “Falaša people” in Israel, the traditions concerning their mythical origin have changed.

Although the Betä Āsra’el did not have a single “official” account of their origins in Ethiopia, the story of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba appears

Source 5. Regional genealogies of the 19th century and the links to the Solomon-Saba cycle

“Azaryas [Azariah] stayed with Mənilək. And Elyab [Elyas? Eliab?] went to Tāmben, Hət to Šənnar, Sadoq to Sayənt, Adel to Lasta, Efrem [Ephraim] to Goğğam, Nasis to Yārār, Yonatan [Jonathan] to Hārār, Abdəyo in Gondär (or Gəṇəğğar); Gedewon [Gideon] to Šəre, Abḥel to Käfa. Azaryas was titled liqä kahənat, Hət nəguś of Šənnar, Efrem nəguś of Goğğam, Abdəyo nəguś of Gondär. They were at the right of the King. Elyab was untitled nəguś of Tāmben, Adel nəguś of Lasta, Yonatan nəguś of Hārār, Abḥel nəguś of Käfa. They were at the left of the King Mənilək during the time of his reign. (...) The liqä kahənat is the son of Aron, Hət is the son of Amnon, the son of David; Elyab is the son of ‘Əsey [Isaï]; Gedewon is the son of [Bethelya (or Abbat’ya), the son of David]; Adel is the son of Yətäḥāram, the son of David; Efrem is a descendant of Əsey [Isaï], the son of Əsalama’e (Salām’e); Sadoq is from Betləḥem, the son of Midäb (Əminadäb), Abdəyo is a descendant of Yosef, Yonatan is a descendant of Gälä’ad and Berzibe, Nasis is a descendant of Yehuda [Juda], Abḥel a descendant of Bənyam [Benjamin].” from the *History of Goğğam*, manuscript found in the Church of Mängəštä Šamayāt in Goğğam.

Margaux Herman, “(Re)writing the history of Goggam in ancient and mediaeval times: the prism of the nineteenth-century regional historiography,” in *Essays in Ethiopian Manuscript Studies Proceedings of the International Conference Manuscripts and Texts, Languages and Contexts: the Transmission of Knowledge in the Horn of Africa. Hamburg, 17–19 July 2014*, edited by Alessandro Bausi, Alessandro Gori and Denis Nosnitsin (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2015), 129.

Other similar versions, though with variations, are found throughout the country, like the tradition found in Z^w ay (Casimir Mondhon-Vidhailet, “Une tradition éthiopienne,” *Revue Sémitique* 12 (1904): 259–66.)

to have dominated their traditions before the 20th century. However, the Betä Əsra’el, while embracing the tradition of a Solomonic descent, usually stressed their separation from the other Ethiopian communities. The most common version of their origin claimed that they were the descendants of the twelve eldest sons of the council of Solomon, who came back with Mənilək I to Ethiopia. Thus, by associating themselves with the Solomon-Sheba legend, they claimed to be part of the political-cultural elite. In a similar manner, the fact that they called themselves “Əsra’elites,” rather than Jews (*ayhud*), placed them alongside the Ethiopian royal family, therefore belonging to the *daqiqä Əsra’el* (“The children of Israel”).

A last type of variation of the myth highlights as their ancestors a group of artisans and builders who came back from Israel with Makədda. As already mentioned, these versions could not have been initiated by them as it marks them as inferior for not being from the group of the first born. To conclude, until the 20th century, the Betä Əsra’el desired to be considered, not necessarily as descendants of King Solomon, but like their contemporaries, as originating

Source 6. Different versions of the myth of foundation of the Betä ʿĪsraʾel communities

The first and most commonly spread version of their myth of foundation was recorded by James Bruce: “Being very industrious, these people multiplied exceedingly, and were very powerful at the time of the conversion to Christianity, or, as they term it, the apostacy under Abreha and Atszbeha. At that time, they declared a prince of the tribe of Judah, and of the race of Solomon and Menilek, their sovereign. The name of this prince was Phineas, who refused to abandon the religion of his forefathers, and from him their sovereigns are lineally descended; so they have still a prince of the house of Judah.”

James Bruce, *Travels to Discover the Sources of the Nile, in the Years 1768, 1769, 1770, 1771, 1772 & 1773* (Edinburgh: Archibald Constable and Co. and Manners and Miller, London: T. N. Longman and O. Rees, 1804, 2nd ed.): t. 2, b. 2, ch. VI, 407–8.

Another variant is the one given by the Anglican cleric Samuel Gobat (1834) who heard it from an old Falasha woman:

“Solomon had a son by the queen of Sheba, named Menilac, (...), in leaving the holy city he took the precaution not to go without some memento of the religion of his fathers, and made choice of the ark of the covenant. (...) He had the hardihood to prosecute his journey on the Sabbath, and coming to a river on that holy day, he, together with a part of his company, passed over, bearing the sacred memorial with them. From that time he became Christian, as well as all who crossed the stream with him. The Falashas are those who remain firm in the faith of Moses, and refused to pass the river on the Sabbath. The ark has since been lodged in the city of Axum, but is inaccessible for Christians; and only a few Falashas are able to approach it. When an uncommonly learned or pious Falasha draws near that part of the wall where the ark rests, it immediately divided itself to the right and left, and thus continues till the devotee has entered in, completed his adorations, and returned.”

Samuel Gobat, *Journal of a Three Years' Residence in Abyssinia* (New York: M. W. Dodd, 1850), 331.

from the kingdom of Israel. However, today, Ethiopian Jews in Israel reject any connection to this tradition and deny any relation with King Solomon. They present themselves as descendants of the Jews who followed the Biblical prophet Jeremiah to Egypt, or as the descendants of the lost tribe of Dan. These are new traditions directly inspired by the Bible. They are recounting that they reached Ethiopia independently from Mənəlik. These new developments show an effort to insert their history into the general history of Jews in the world rather than being a part of the collective Ethiopian history.

3. The political decline of Aksum in the 10th century surrounded by legends all linked to an unknown historical queen

3.1. Historical evidence of a non-Christian queen of the 10th century

It is said that, in the 10th century, a queen ruined the Aksumite kingdom. From a historical point of view, the revolt is indisputable, as is the role of a

non-Christian, non-Aksumite queen. The Arabic writer, Ibn Hawkal, who lived in the latter half of the 10th century, testifies that a queen had reigned over the vast kingdom of the Habaša and some neighbouring territories for about 30 years. Besides, the *History of the Patriarchs of the Egyptian Church* also states that in the same period, the “Queen of the Bani al-Hamwiya” imprisoned many Ethiopians, burned towns, destroyed churches and destroyed Aksum.

On the other hand, Christian oral traditions, mainly written and relayed during the 18th century in the Short Chronicles, are contradictory and not contemporary with the event. In these versions, the queen is named in a negative way as Yodit/Gudit (deviant), ʾṢatu (fire) or Ga’ewa. She is described, depending on the traditions, with both positive and negative characteristics. In some, she was a beautiful woman of the royal family (Masobä Wärq), much like the Queen of Sheba, while in others she was a prostitute (Gudit, ʾṢatu, Ga’ewa) who killed the Ethiopian king, captured the throne, and acted as a cruel ruler destroying Aksum, persecuting the priests, and closing the churches.

However, in spite of the different names and variations in the story, there can be no doubt that a strong female ruler rose to power in Ethiopia, ended Aksumite rule and made way for the Zag^we dynasty.

3.2. *The Christian traditions*

One version developed probably by the Christian communities relates the story of Queen “Gudit” destroying the churches of Aksum, forcing the people to displace the Ark of the Covenant (or *tabot*) to the south, to the monastery of Däbrä Səyon, on an island in Lake Z^way. The queen is said to have killed all members of the royal house who were in Däbrä Damo at the time, except for Del Na’ad, the son of the last king, who fled to the Šäwa region.

Another tradition mentioned in the hagiography of Iyasus Mo’a dated from the 17th century, deals with Masobä Warq, the daughter of the last Aksumite king, Del Na’ad. Against her father’s will, she married a high military official, Mära Täklä Haymanot, from Lasta. Together, they took over the throne and founded the so-called Zag^we dynasty, considered, in later tradition, to be “usurpers.” Another version only presented by James Bruce at the end of the 18th century, described a violent “Jewish” queen campaigning against the Christians (see captions below). Described as the antithesis of Makadda, she was not only a virgin (in some stories, she is presented as a prostitute), but she wanted also to destroy the Ark of the Covenant.

3.3. *The episode of “Gudit” in the Betä ʾṢra’el tradition*

It is significant that the Betä ʾṢra’el also accepted the “Gudit episode” calling the queen Yodit/Yudit and acknowledging her in recent times as one of their ancestors. A late version from 1973 offers a complete synthesis of all the

Source 7. The Zag^we Kings as usurpers in the colophon of the *Kəbrä Nagašt*

All these traditions are in accordance with one of the sentences of the colophon of the 14th century Kəbrä Nagašt which states that: "(...) thus the kingdom passed to another people, who were not of the tribe of Israel."

Wallis Budge, E. A., *The Queen of Sheba and Her Only Son Menyelek (Kəbrä Nagašt)* (op. cit).

elements of myth and history known among the Betä ʾƏsra'el. It combines ideas from a variety of sources such as the *Kəbrä Nəgäšt* or the Bible. It offers a number of possible historical interpretations that cannot be corroborated by any historical evidence. Here, the revolt of an Agəw Queen 'Gudit' (or 'Yudit') is reinterpreted as a Jewish revolt.

Source 8. The history of Queen Judith according to James Bruce

"Gideon and Judith were then king and queen of the Jews, and their daughter Judith (whom, in Amhara, they call Esther, and sometimes Saat, i.e. fire) was a woman of great beauty, and talents for intrigue; she had been married to the governor of a small district called Bugna, in the neighbourhood of Lasta, both of which countries were likewise much infected with Judaism. Judith had made so strong a party that she resolved to attempt the subversion of the Christian religion, and, with it, the succession in the line of Solomon. (...) Accordingly, she surprised the rock Damo, and slew all the princes there, to the number, it is said, of about 400. (...) Judith took possession of the throne, in defiance of the law of the queen of Saba, by this, the first interruption of the succession in the line of Solomon; and, (...), from the violent means she had used to acquire the crown, she not only enjoyed it herself, during a long reign of forty years, but transmitted it also to five of her posterity, all of them barbarous names, originating probably in Lasta. (...) I have followed the histories and traditions which are thought the most authentic in the country, the subject of which they treat, and where I found them; and though they may differ from other accounts given by European authors, this does not influence me."

Bruce, James, *Travels to Discover the Sources of the Nile, in the Years 1768, 1769, 1770, 1771, 1772 & 1773* (Edinburgh: Archibald Constable and Co. and Manners and Miller, London: T. N. Longman and O. Rees, 1804, 2nd ed.), t. 2, b. 4, 451–54.

4. Akko Manoyye, the last ancestral Queen of the Guji Oromo

The Guji people are members of the larger Oromo group in Ethiopia and occupy the southern highland and lowland semi-arid areas. Like other Oromo groups, they have an elaborate system of customary governance based on generation, known as *gadaa*. Guji women play an important role both in the household and in their society. However, their minor status is perpetuated through various myths. A popular story about the legendary queen Akko Manoye, that used to rule the people, is commonly told among different branches of the Oromo, such as the Guji, the Borana group and other settled

agriculturalists. It legitimises the concentration of power in the hands of men, as women are ineffective in ruling.

Source 9. The history of Queen Akko Manoyye and the dynastic rule of succession

“Akko Manoyye was one of the queens that ruled the Guji. During her rule, every task, including caring for children, was performed by husbands, and every decision was made by women. One day she ordered her people to bring a bag full of fleas, an order they were unable to carry out. (...) (The queen) made another difficult directive, which was building a house on the air. (...) (A) poor man (...) told (the men) to dig a deep hole, cover it with animal skin, and stand a seat on it for her. When she sat on the chair, she went down the hole, during which she uttered a message to women: ‘sobi sobadhuu buli,’ which means ‘pretend to respect male authority.’ Following her death, according to the story, a man called Durii Dullooo became the first king.”

Dejene N. Debsu, “Gender and Culture in Southern Ethiopia: An Ethnographic Analysis of Guji-Oromo Women’s Customary Rights,” *African Study Monographs* 30, no. 1 (2009): 22–23.

However, Guji women still revere their legendary queens and use them for their empowerment in rituals and prayers. For example, when drought occurs, whereas men pray directly to *Waaq*, the Oromo Supreme God, women gather and chant to Oyoyo Garoyye, Akko Manoyye (their legendary queens) and, through them, ask their *Waaq* for rains. It is also said that they pray under Mekkonnisa, a specific tree under which Akko Manoyye was buried.

In the Sidaama communities, Queen Furra is described in the same narrative schemes. Therefore, these traditions are used in order to avoid women’s pretention to political empowerment.

Conclusion

These traditions are mythical narratives of the groups’ identities, and all arose around great women showing that all Ethiopians traced their origins back to an ancestral mother, usually a queen. Therefore, “history” appears to have been generally written by men, who used myths to justify the position of women in the societies and their ineffectiveness in ruling. However, it can also be understood the other way round as all great male dynasties came from a strong woman (like Makadda) who, through her marriage and children, brought forth the rightful king.

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Part 3

Women and Religion

Chapter 3

Women and Christianity

“And they pleasantly entertained themselves with spiritual discourses.”

Raineri Osvaldo (1999, 212).

The Ethiopian Orthodox Tāwahədo* Church (EOTC) is the oldest and largest Christian denomination* in Ethiopia. The research into its history, theology, manuscripts, and art, to mention only some, is immense, but very little has been done on gendering research* or on women’s history in it. This chapter explores the discourse found in the EOTC documentation, not to validate its historical value, but to examine the perception of women within the EOTC tradition and the Ethiopian Christian society.

1. The impact of women on the Ethiopian Church

Research on the EOTC needs an exploratory reading of primary sources such as the hagiographic literature. The *Mūshafū Sənkəssar** contains few lives of female saints, but unedited manuscripts, pictorial art and other sources like royal chronicles have provided new findings. But not only the written testimonies count; pictorial representations must also be included. The visible female presence in art is crucial for the Ethiopian society’s perception of women and two women especially are often displayed, the Queen of Sheba and Mary.

1.1. Biblical women and historical saints

For the EOTC, some biblical figures are of Ethiopian origin, like the Queen of Sheba (Makədda or *nəgəstā* Azeb). The Ethiopian discourse recounts that back from her visit to King Solomon of Israel (1 Kings 10:1-13; 2 Chronicles 9:1-12; Matthew 12:42; Luke 11:32), she brought monotheistic belief to Ethiopia, first in the form of Judaism and later, and thus indirectly, Christianity. She bore Mənilək I and became the ancestress of the Solomonic dynasty. The *Kəbrä Nəgəst** (*The Glory of the Kings*) describes in detail her visit and Mənilək’s bringing of the Ark of the Covenant to Aksum. The monarchy ended in 1974 with the overthrow of Emperor Həylä Šəllase I, but the Queen of Sheba remains a figure of religious and cultural identification, trumping Mənilək I in



Figure 2. Michael Gervers, *Mika'el-Gabr'el Church, Säqota, Wällo*.

the national memorialisation. The Blessed Virgin Mary (Maryam), although not Ethiopian, was a refugee with her family in Ethiopia according to some Ethiopian compositions (*Nägärä Maryam**). In artistic representations Mary is omnipresent, mainly depicted as an Ethiopian woman. She is the most venerated saint in Ethiopia and the literature for her (like *Mälkä'a Maryam**) and about her (like *Tä'ammärä Maryam**) is immense.

1.2. *Originators of Church feasts*

According to the self-conception of the EOTC, women not only brought religion to Ethiopia, like the Queen of Sheba, and the religion of Solomon, they also were the reason for church feasts due to their lives or deeds. The 33 Feasts of Mary (42 at the time of King Zär'a Ya'eqob during the 15th century) celebrate all the stages of Mary's life, even beyond death, and her miracles. One of the most significant festivals of the EOTC, *Mäsqäl**, the Feast of the Cross is attributed to Queen Helena (Āleni) of Constantinople (3rd-4th century). The Church Fathers* like Ambrosius of Milano, chronicle her trip to Jerusalem, where she found the grave of Jesus with the remains of the True Cross. She immediately lit a torch to be seen. She erected the church above the grave in Jerusalem (Church of the Holy Sepulchre, also called Church of the Resurrection).

1.3. Historical saints

Saints have been crucial for the development of the EOTC. Female saints with biographical evidence can be roughly divided into two categories: the queens and the nuns. They have fulfilled at least one of the four points to become a saint: 1. Miracles and/or good deeds; 2. Self-sacrifice; 3. Teaching, writing and missionizing; 4. Asceticism.

1.3.1. Queens

Several queens are canonized as Saints by the EOTC, like *Ītege** Mäsqäl Kəbra (late 12th-early 13th century). She was the co-founder of the famous rock-hewn churches in Lalibāla, especially Abba Libanos which was erected according to her specifications. Two miracles are attributed to her. She implemented a certain indigenization* of the Ethiopia church hierarchy through the fall of metropolitan Mika‘el II and the consecration of her brother Ḥayrun as bishop. This was revolutionary as the Coptic metropolitan was the highest rank of the Ethiopian Church until 1951. In Mādäbay Tabor, Təgre, there is a *tabot** with her face carved on it.

1.3.2. Nuns and abbey founders

Some women devote their life to God and take the monastic vow. They live alone as anchoresses* or as hermits (*baḥtawīyan**) to follow the ideal of eremitic asceticism. Nuns can also live together in a convent (cenobitic*). Ethiopian sources name ʿĪdna, the mother of *abunä* Arägawi (5th-6th century) as the one who established the first nunnery.



Figure 3. Stanilas Chojnacki, *Female saints* by Brancalcione

Zena Maryam (14th century) of Ənfraz lived for 25 years as a hermit in a cave (Wašša Əndrəyas), later in a monastery at Lake Tana. She established a strict female asceticism through minimal nourishment (herbs, *kos**). She had several disciples, like Sābälä Maryam. She argued about female physicality like menstruation and their consequences for liturgical worship. This discussion about biology was elementary for the development of the Ethiopian (male) perception of female saints. All aspects of the female body should be negated.

Krəstos Šämra (14th/15th century) abandoned her husband and her ten children following a vow and became a nun in Däbrä Libanos of Šäwa. Later she founded a convent on the island of G^wangut on Lake Tana and became the head of the monastery. She continued with her ascetic life and practised self-mortification like praying in a deep hole for days or standing for three years in the lake. She had many visions and preached about peace. Her image as a repenting sinner on the one side and on the other as a saviour of repenting souls from hell is unique in the EOTC. Her tomb became a place of pilgrimage.

Fəqärtä Krəstos (17th century) was a martyr*. She was involved in a theological controversy between the metropolitan *abunä* Marqos and King Fasilädäs. Some traditions said she was part of the anti-Catholic movement. She was tortured and killed.

Source 10. Prophecy made to the parents of Wälättä Peṭros

Prophecy made to the parents of Wälättä Peṭros, “To you will be born a wonderful daughter, who will shine like the sun in all quarters of the world. And she will be a guide for the blind-hearted; earthly kings and metropolitans will confess to her; many people from the four corners of the world will gather by her, and they will constitute a single community of God’s saints.”

Acta sanctae Wälättä Peṭros, 6.



Figure 4. Wälättä Peṭros discusses with Emperor Susənyos

Saint Wälättä Peṭros (b. 1594, d. 1644) struggled against the installation of Catholicism under emperor Susənyos. She left her husband and started to live with other nuns, like Əḥətä Krəstos, on Lake Tana. In 1624, she sought asylum in Aksum but due to her rebellion against the Catholic creed, she was brought back to court. There, she discussed with the Jesuits. Pedro Paez reported about her firmness. After the reinstatement of the Orthodoxy under King Fasilädäs, she travelled around to visit famous teachers, taught the right belief to her multiple disciples and founded seven monasteries. As Mother Superior, she defined nunnery rules and became archdeaconess. Her foundations were all fully self-sufficient. Her *gädl** was written soon after her death and is said to be the earliest known full biography of an African woman. Women make pilgrimages to her grave in Rema and gather on the 16th of each month on the day of her remembrance at alternating homes. These gatherings in the name of a saint (*mahbär**) enabled women to discuss theological issues.

Table 1. Categories for visibility and collective memorialisation of women (selection by V. Böll)

Name of Saint	Reason for Visibility/ Memorialisation	Historical evidence	Proven existence	Primary sources
Queen of Sheba	Ancestress of the Solomonic dynasty; religious significance	Relations to the holy land	No	Bible, <i>Kəbrä Nəgəst</i> , Jewish sources, Quran
Ətege Mäsqäl Kəbra	Church builder, strengthening of the independence of the EOTC	Abba Libanos in Lalibäla	Yes	<i>Gädl</i> [not edited]
Zena Maryam	Establishment of female asceticism; theological debates about biology (menstruation)	Monastery; disciples	Yes	<i>Gädl</i> ; <i>Gädl</i> of her disciple Säbälä Maryam [not edited].
Krəstos Šämrä	Establishment of self-mortification; visionary; repenting sinner and savior	Monastery, tombs	Yes	<i>Gädl</i> , chronicle, records of the Jesuits
Wälättä Peṭros	Theologian, defender of the orthodoxy, abbey foundress, archdeaconess, female religious leadership	Seven monasteries, monastic rules, theological debates, grave at Rema	Yes	<i>Gädl</i> , chronicle, records of the Jesuits

2. Further contributions of orthodox women

2.1. Female theologians and their significance for the EOTC

Female theologians are accepted in the EOTC. They authored theological writings and religious poetry. Over the centuries women intervened in theological disputes. Two nuns were crucial in the resistance against missionaries; significantly, Wälättä Peṭros became famous and is honoured as “the defender” of the Orthodox belief. Other theologians can be mentioned here.

Ītege Ēleni (b. ca. 1431, d. ca. 1522), her royal name was Admas Mogäsa, wrote several letters to Portugal to establish a Christian Ethiopian-European network against the neighbouring sultanates. Her letter to King Manuel I of Portugal (1494–1525) is the oldest Ethiopian diplomatic document to Europe. Mateus, an Armenian living in Ethiopia, travelled on her behalf with a relic of the cross to prove the Christian belief of Ethiopia (see Source 11). Ēleni is the author of two compositions, the *Hohätä Bərhan** and the *‘Ānzira səbhat**, beautiful hymns for Mary. She promoted the translation of the Arabic scriptures and the reproduction of the theological manuscripts. Ēleni founded the famous monastery Märṭulä Maryam in eastern Goḡḡam and linked it to the Ewostateans* doctrine. She was buried there.

Source 11. Diplomatic gifts send by queen Ēleni to John, King of Portugal

“With our ambassador, Matthew, we are sending you a cross, made from the same wood on which our Lord was sacrificed in Jerusalem and of which a portion was sent to us. We made out of it two crosses, one we retained for ourselves, the other we have sent to you. It is of a black colour and has a silver ring for hanging.”

Sergew Hable-Selassie, “The Ge’ez letter of Queen Eleni and Libne Dingil to John, King of Portugal,” in *IV Congresso internazionale di studi etiopici*, (Roma, 2–4 aprile 1972), edited by Thomas Leiper Kane (Roma: Accademia nazionale dei Lincei, 1974), 547–66.

Ītege Säblä Wängel (b. ca. 1500, d. 30 November 1567) accompanied the Portuguese army on their way southwards to fight against the troops of Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm al Gāzī. She ensured the existence of the Christian kingdom. While the Portuguese stayed, she argued with them about the right creed. The Portuguese, impressed by her erudition, report in detail about her mighty influence on the EOTC.

Saint *Ītege* Wäld Šä‘ala (Šəltan Mogäsa, d. ca. 1661) taught her children the Orthodox faith, against the order of her husband, Emperor Susənyos, who had converted to the Catholic creed due to the Jesuit missionaries. The Jesuit sources repeatedly mention her theological impact. Her theological interest can also be seen in the comprehensive library she built in the Qoma Fasilädäs monastery, founded by her in 1630. Through her collection of theological works, like *Mäzgäbä Haymanot**, she secured the rich stock of Ethiopian theological books.

Remarkably interesting is also the life of Ləya (15th century). She lived in a place called Q^wətərəh and was known as a pious woman. Saint Iyasu (*gädl*) explicitly went to her for learning and serving.

Source 12. Teachings of Ḥmmahoy Gälanäš Haddis

“The entrance of women to the chantry has no shame, if the scholars examine it, because chanting is from the beginning a woman’s duty.”

Ḥmmahoy Gälanäš Haddis.

Ḥmmahoy Gälanäš Haddis (b. 1896, d. 19 July 1986) was a well-known master of *qəne** and a traditional church scholar. She studied theology with her father, *qesä gäbäz* Haddis Kidan, and became a specialist in *andəmta**. She taught *qəne* to about 1,750 students. Her compositions are often cited by the EOTC. She emphasised the importance of singing, and women participating as female choirs in the liturgy on feasts. Expressing spirituality through singing and moving was introduced by the first religious songstress, Mary (Miryam) the sister of Moses (Exodus 15:20–21).

Ḥtege Taytu Bəṭul (Bərhan Zä’ityopya, b. ca. 1853, d. 11 February 1918), grew up in Däbrä Mäwi monastery, and studied theology. She could read and write Amharic and *gə’əz* and composed religious poetry in both languages. She founded Ḥntoṭto Maryam among other churches.

2.2. Benefactresses

Women owned their own land and donated it to the EOTC, often founding churches or monasteries. Women appear very often in manuscripts as donors of furnishings, liturgical items like crosses and religious paintings and as financiers of precious illuminated manuscripts.

A good example of the irreplaceable contribution of female donors to the maintenance of the EOTC is *Ḥtege Bərhan Mogäsa*, christened Wälättä Giyorgis and known as Məntəwwab, (co-reign 1731–69, d. 1773). With her deep theological knowledge, she took part in the discussions about the Trinity. Following the *Qəbat** doctrine, she established it as the official dogma of the court. She was a significant patron of cultural goods and she equipped libraries with precious manuscripts, like the 57 books she donated to Narga Šəllase. She ordered the composition of the famous book *Haymanotä Abäw**. By her command, not only her palace and church at Q^wəsq^wam were erected, but also churches like Däbrä Šähay and Narga Šəllase. She had the church murals painted and icons manufactured according to her ideas, and even images of her were engraved in the grand processional crosses for liturgy. Interestingly, the lists of the ministers and of the keepers of the sanctuary in Narga Šəllase names several women, like *liqtä dənagəl* Wälättä Qəddusan, *wäyzäro** Šahlä Šəllase or even *Ḥtege** Bərhan Mogäsa herself.

Source 13. The history of the construction of the church Narga Šellase by Ǽtege Məntəwwab

“Then the queen called carpenters and masons and gave them much gold and silver and exquisite food and told them: “Build a church for me, in honour of the Holy Trinity; Father, Son and Holy Ghost!” Then those carpenters and masons told her: “Be it as you said, Oh queen (who sits) on the throne of David, be it as you command, our lady of all women, be it as you wish, beloved by men and angels.”

Osvaldo Raineri, “The Story of Narga (Zena Narga),” in *Churches of Ethiopia: the Monastery of Narga Šellase*, edited by M. di Salvo, S. Chojnacki, O. Raineri (Milano: Skira, 1999), 212.

Table 2. Contributions of Christian Women (selection by V. Böll)

Name	Category	Details	Impacts	Relevance
Ǽtege Ǽleni	Theologian; founder; diplomat	Translation of manuscripts (Arabic) and own scriptures; Ewostateans doctrine	Correspondence with Europe, envoy with relic; Discussion about dogmatism	Female author and theologian; founder of Märṭulä Maryam
Ǽmmahoy Gälanäš Haddis	Theologian; scholar	qəne, theology; exegetical works (andəmta)	Teacher of 1,750 students	Female traditional church scholar and master of qəne
Ǽtege Bərhan Mogäsa	Theologian; Benefactress; founder; architect	Own architecture and art; Qəbat doctrine	Library, transfer of wisdom, establishment of female offices	Founder of Narga Šəllase and others; manuscripts; pictorial art

Conclusion

Ethiopian women have been crucial for the EOTC throughout the 1,700 years of its existence. Women appeared as ancestresses, saints, martyrs, nuns, theologians, scholars and authors, abbey founders, church builders and benefactresses. Important manuscripts have been saved through their investments and generosity. International exchange was established, especially with Europe. The national memory of these powerful women already exists but awaits the transfer into historiography. The sources can be re-read with the methods of gender studies or women’s history and a new church history can be written.

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Meron Zeleke
Silvia Bruzzi

Chapter 4

Islam and Gender in Ethiopia

“Men (are) Muslims and women pagans.”

Trimingham, J. Spencer.
Islam in Ethiopia. (Oxford: Oxford
University Press: 1952).

Women have for long been neglected in social and historical. Works on Islam and gender in sub-Saharan Africa predominantly build on disempowerment narratives of the insignificant role of women as stipulated in the “peripheral possession” or “protest cults.” According to the recent article published in 2021 by Meron Zeleke, there are a number of Ethiopian women from different historical epochs known for their military prowess; their diplomatic skills, renowned as religious figures and more. Compared to other parts of the African continent, the role and position of women in Islam in Ethiopia is a topic that is understated with the exception of a few works addressing the formation of Muslim regional cults centering on a female figure. The topic of religious revivalism in post-1991 Ethiopia have addressed gender as a variable perspective of inquiry. This chapter gives a brief overview of women and Islam in Ethiopia. By going beyond mere focus on historical narratives, it draws on prior studies conducted by the authors.

1. Women and Islam in Ethiopia

1.1. *How to study the history of Sufi women*

Muslim women played particularly significant roles at interreligious shrines and in Sufi* orders, in which, at least from the late 19th century onwards, we find remarkable traces of pious and holy women. Nevertheless, it remains an undeniable fact that if the history of Ethiopian women has often been overlooked, studies on Muslim women are even scarcer. Both colonial and Arabic sources have mostly been written through a predominantly masculine gaze that overshadows the agency of women: for example, even though there is an abundance of Arabic literature on Sufism in sub-Saharan Africa, women only figure in it sporadically. Unlike their male counterparts, the life histories of Sufi women are rarely reported in hagiographies; in fact, it is difficult to even

find their names, because they are not included in the genealogies of Islamic brotherhoods, and even where they do appear, their status as wives, mothers, or daughters of a *shaykh** is often the only form of identification available.

1.2. *Some prominent Muslim women in ancient and medieval history*

Finding Muslim women in the long history of Ethiopia is akin to searching in the dark. Although there may be traces of them crystallized in sites of memory, their stories have mainly been handed down through social memory, and only rarely in written literature. Despite this, a few prominent personalities did attain popularity and visibility in the country. A number of pious women became popular icons in Ethiopia in the earliest days of Islam because they were among the first to become Muslims.

The best-known example of this is a slave, Umm Ayman (Barakah, Rady Allāhu ‘Anhā), the Prophet’s Abyssinian nurse, whom he looked to as his second mother. Umm Ḥabība Bint Abī Sufyān and Umm Salmā Bint Abī Umayya fled with the first Muslims who took part in the migration to Abyssinia, and are considered among the first of the Prophet’s disciples. After the deaths of their husbands, they married the Prophet and returned to Arabia, where they told of the wonders of Aksum. They are viewed among Jabarti communities as role models for Ethiopian women.

Another personality from a few centuries later who is remembered in the history of Ethiopia is Batī Del Wāmbāra, daughter of the *amūn** of Zäyla, Maḥfuz and wife of *imām** Aḥmad ibn Ibrahīm al-Gāzī. Powerful and ready to die for her faith, she succeeded in negotiating the release of Muslims leaders who had been captured by Christians in Harar. She was a symbol of success in the “holy war.”

Source 14. Batī Del Wāmbāra on military campaign

“When the army reached Kub, they said to the Imām: ‘We will not accompany you to Abyssinia unless your wife Dəl Wāmbāra returns to the country of the Muslims. She shall not come with us to the country of the infidels. Not one of the Imāms ever took his wife with him [on campaign], only you.’ Ignoring the protests of Aḥmād’s soldiers, Dəl Wāmbāra imperiously replied: ‘I will not go back’. So her husband took her as far as Ifat in the land of the infidels.”

Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Arabfaḳīh, *Futūh al-Habaša: The Conquest of Abyssinia*, by ‘Arab Faḳīh, translated by Paul Lester Stenhouse, annotation by Richard Pankhurst (Hollywood, CA: Tschai Publishers, 2009), 60.

1.3. *Holy women and scholars (1850–1930)*

In Harar, where the role of women in teaching and handing down Islamic learning is well-known and recognised, Muna Abubaker I has shed light

on the forgotten figure of a Harari scholar, Ay Amatullāh (1851–1893), the daughter of the *qāḍī** of Harar, ‘Abd al-Rahman bin Muḥammad, and Umma Ḥalima. She was a *zāhid*, a pious woman, who was not interested in worldly goods, and had been given the title of *ḳabīr**, which was normally granted to learned men. Ay Amatullāh studied with the same teacher Ibrahim as her brothers, thereby receiving a high level of education, and she became one of the preeminent scholars of her time. She studied Arabic grammar, the Quran, the Hadith Exegesis, and Islamic law, and became a *faqīh**. Her brothers, who were *qāḍī*, would ask her for advice on religious issues, and to all intents and purposes she was a teacher of men and women alike. It was not common at the time for women to be highly educated. Education within the family network represented a privilege for women. It was only in the rare cases in which a member of their family was a *ḳabīr*, as with Ay Amatullāh, that higher education became available to them.

In Arsi, Sittī Momina (d. 1929) became popular for her spiritual practices and healing powers. Her shrine in Faraqasa became a place of worship for Muslims and Christian visitors from across the region, and was famous for being a place of religious co-existence, where pilgrims would join together to recite *dīkr** that Sittī Momina had composed. Participation in these communal prayers is still considered to help solve all kinds of personal problems today.

1.4. *The city of Harar, a depository of women's legacy in Islam in the Horn of Africa*

While the women mentioned may be among the most popular Sufi women in Northeast Africa, they should not be viewed as exceptional cases; rather, they represent the best-known examples of a broader phenomenon. Other women acquired comparable status in the area, as proved by the female names given to a number of shrines and mosques in Harar, which is one of the most important centres of Islamic learning in the Horn of Africa. Today, their historical memories are preserved in oral literature, or crystallised at sites of memory such as holy shrines and mosques. Of the 356 shrines in Harar, at least 10% are dedicated to women, but there are also several mosques in the city (10 out of 82) that were built by pious women from the elites.

In the market square, among these material traces we found the Sittī ‘Alawiyya Mosque, or the Italian Mosque, which was built in Sittī ‘Alawiyya’s honour and inaugurated by her in person during her visit in 1937. While colonial archives are particularly reticent regarding her, Sittī ‘Alawiyya was a very important agent of the Islamic renewal of Ethiopia where several mosques were built in her honour during the Italian occupation. If her voice is silenced in the archives, several portraits are nonetheless available in private archives and travel literature.



Figure 5. Silvia Bruzzi, *Sitti 'Alawiyya Mosque in Harar*

Sufi *shaykh*'s way of dressing is very meaningful. In some cases, it can be considered as a further expression of the unity of believers, the principle of the *tawhīd*. The use of both Christian and Islamic symbols expresses the interreligious dimension of Sufi practices that are widespread in Ethiopia.

In this image Sitti 'Alawiyya appears in a very symbolic dress. It is a special *hiḡāb* similar to that used by Catholic nuns, it brings to mind both Christian and Islamic symbols and values.



Figure 6. Sitti 'Alawiyya's portrait (unknown photographer)

2. Muslim women beyond orthodoxy and heresy

The latest trend in the study of women and Islam in Ethiopia tilts to the discourse of debating religious orthodoxy, often framed in a gendered manner.

2.1. Women are considered guardians of pre-Islamic religious traditions

Classic works on Islam in Africa, such as Trimmingham's, tended to replicate the discourse in which a section of the male Muslim community historically

sought to delegitimise the religious authority of women in Islamic societies. There is a tendency for women to be presented as guardians of pre-Islamic religious traditions, and they are often associated with certain practices that are considered “unorthodox.”

Source 15. Women and Islam

“Everywhere, men would be “more deeply involved in Islam whereas women’s participation is marginal, for Islam provided women little scope for ritual participation.”

Trimingham, John Spencer, *The Influence of Islam upon Africa*, (London: Longman, 1980), 46–47.

2.2. Gendered responses of the Sufi *shaykh* facing criticism

In the contemporary debates of religious orthodoxy whereby Islamic Sufi shrines often face accusations of being highly syncretised while hosting some unorthodox religious rituals and practices, the counter narratives of the Sufis are often framed in a gendered manner. For example, in Northeast Ethiopia, the *zār-ḥaḍra** ritual was a target of criticism from legalists. A study conducted in Teru Sina shows informants mentioning the overarching gendering nature of spirituality and the dominant local view of the gendered claim of religious orthodoxy with the striking phrase *ya inatihin likāk ya abathin atbiḳ* (Leave your mother’s way and hold onto to your father’s), which emphasises the gendered nature of religious authenticity. Sufi leaders strategically omit some religious practices which are conspicuous in producing evidence for the Salafi accusations of *bidaa** while they redefine others. In their counter narratives, leaders of the shrine narrow the general criticism only as something addressed to the rituals practiced by women even though in the reality the critiques address other habits such as the very practice of the veneration of saints and the existing belief in the intercession of saints.

The gendering strategy of the Sufi *shaykhs* is framed in different ways. Firstly, they tend to refer to the culturally constructed gender norms as a justification for “women’s spiritual weakness” characterized by their accommodation of different unorthodox elements compared to their male counterparts who are described as custodians of the authentic religion. The other line of argument is framed in such a way that the discussions of religious authenticity are believed to be related directly to the degree of competence in religious knowledge, which women are believed to lack.

Conclusion

The discussion of Islam and women in Ethiopia is a theme that is under-researched and overlooked as a theme of academic inquiry. Apart from the

few sketchy references to gender and Islam in Ethiopia, the latest trend in the academic discourses of Islam and women in the Ethiopian context refers to presenting the role of gender in debates of religious orthodoxy.

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Chapter 5

Women and “Traditional” Beliefs

Kottu ya biftuu tya [Come, oh my (female) light of dawn,]
If duraan si qaba [Let me be the first to catch you]
Dawitti kyia [Through my window,]
Summaḵan ol qaba [Let me find the cure for my ills.]

Ali Mohammed Birra, “Imimaam Jalaala, ‘The Tears of Love’,” track 4 on *Ethiopiquest* 28, Great Oromo Music, Buda Musique, 2015, compact disc.

For two decades, a growing number of academic works (MA theses, PhD dissertations or articles) on the involvement of women in the so-called “traditional” beliefs or religions in Ethiopia has revealed their active contribution in this historically male-centred research field. However, the representations and roles of women exposed in these studies are generally limited to the ambivalent mother/earth-goddess clichés that still haunt the controversial category of “African traditional religions.” To overcome such academic limitations, one might first provide a critical review of the classical historical discourses on these blurry ‘indigenous religions’ and then explore the current trajectories of women’s involvement in one major Ethiopian case study—here the Oromo national religious tradition(s).

1. Classical historical discourses on women and “traditional” religions

1.1. *Controversial definitions of African traditional religion(s)*

In his contribution in the *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, Dirk Bustorf rightly argues that “traditional religions” in Ethiopia are today commonly defined as “local” or “ethnic” beliefs, both anterior to and separate from Christianity or Islam, through the following series of distinct features.

Nevertheless, Bustorf underlines that these distinctions present important shortcomings, embedded in the evolutionist prejudices regarding the implicit superiority of Christian and Muslim “monotheistic civilisations,” over the regional “traditional religions” that were historically considered “primitive tribal superstitions.”

Moreover, the classical distinctions between the so-called “universal” and “traditional” religions based on writing/oral transmission and the celebration of natural spirits/holy figures do not fairly reflect the socio-historical practices

Table 3. Commonly assumed distinctions between universal world religions and “traditional” beliefs

	Three monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam)	African “traditional” religions
Other formal designations	Universal world or Abrahamic religions	Local, ethnic, non-Abrahamic or pre-Christian/Muslim folk-religions
Revelation and transmission means	Writing, holy books	Orality, tales, myths
Rituals and practices	Standardised celebrations of prophets and holy/missionary figures	Syncretistic practices, divination, worshipping natural spirits

By Osmond, based on Bustorf’s entry “Religion(s): Traditional Religion” of the *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*.

Source 16. Definitions of “traditional religions”

“The technical term “traditional religions” is (...) unbalanced or limited in (its) conceptional perspective and may cause misunderstandings (...) because Islam and Christianity also follow “traditions” and obviously have local dimensions and forms. (...) Christians and Muslims frequently despise followers of Ethiopian traditional religions as “unbelievers,” “idolaters” or “pagans” (...) (though) there are practically no features which can be exclusively found in traditional religions nor (...) in those world religions present in Ethiopia (respectively since the 4th and 7th centuries).”

Dirk Bustorf, “Religion(s): Traditional Religion,” in Siegbert Uhlig et al., *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, vol. 4 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz), 361–62.

of both Christianity and Islam. Indeed, the books of the Christian and Islamic revelations were both written and disseminated a long time after the deaths of Jesus and Mohammed (Qur’ān means “recitation” in Arabic, as reciting and memorising it has remained the basis of the Muslim religion, since the 7th century oral revelation by the Archangel Jibril/Gabriel); in addition, the famous Ethiopian Christian Orthodox saint Gābrä Mānfas Qəddus and the Qur’anic holy figure of al-Khidr (“The Green Man”) are both presented as major saints and servants of God, with holy attributes rooted in the animal and natural world.

Last but not least, it might be scientifically doubtful to speculate about the strict anteriority and separation of ‘traditional religions’ from Christianity and Islam, due to the very ancient history of Christianity and Islam in Ethiopia—respectively from the 4th and 7th centuries. In other words, the commonly assumed non- and pre-Christian/Muslim linear history of these blurry “African traditional religions” might rather depict the plural and still understudied

national trajectories of Christian and Muslim reformations, accompanying the controversial political history of medieval and contemporary Ethiopia.

Source 17. Interactions between Christian, Muslims and Oromo religious ideas

“Striking similarities among the Christian, Muslim and Oromo religious ideas reflect the long interaction among the three communities.”

Mohammed Hassen, *The Oromo and the Christian Kingdom of Ethiopia 1300–1700* (Rochester: Boydell & Brewer, 2015), 18.

1.2. “Traditional” religions in Ethiopian and Western Christian historiography

The classical Ethiopian and European Christian historiography generally associate the regional ‘autochthonous religions’ with the diverse Gamo, Hadiya, etc. and mostly Oromo populations living in the southern margins of the northern Habaša Christian kingdoms.

From the Orthodox monk *abba* Bahrey’s writings of the 16th century, to those of the French Catholic and German or Swedish Protestant missionaries and the Ethiopian (and notably Oromo) elites they trained during the 19th–20th centuries, these historical sources present three different—and sometimes radically opposed—descriptions of these ambivalent “primitive religions” of “foreign invaders” or “indigenous biblical descendants.”

Habaša Christian Orthodox officials	European Catholic and Protestant missionaries	(Oromo) Evangelical ethno-national actors
The 16th century conquests of the “pagan [Oromo] invaders” as the main plague or curse that has ever threatened the Christian Habaša kingdom	“Primitive monotheism of the native descendants of ancient biblical prophets and the 19th–20th centuries evangelisation of the “(Oromo) <i>Gentiles</i> nation”	Current Afrocentrist revivals of the “original monotheistic legacies” of “indigenous nationalities” in the Ethiopian Federation, like the Oromo <i>Waaqefata</i> movement

In 2014, Osmond demonstrated that these three classical Christian interpretations reveal the religious and political reformist dynamics that (re-)shape the divergent definitions of (Oromo) “traditional religions” throughout the medieval political history of Christian Habaša kingdoms and the contemporary emergence of the modern Ethiopian state—from the medieval “barbarian peril” or “national emancipation” incarnated by the 16th century (Oromo) “foreign invasions” or “autochthonous uprisings,” to the contemporary “national liberation movements” challenging the imperial regime, or the current institutional recognition of “ethno-linguistic nationalities” and “indigenous cultural (religious) heritages.”

Apart from their close connections with the history of Ethiopian national politics, these main Christian historical narratives on (Oromo) “traditional

religions” have provided limited knowledge of the involvement of women, often fenced into quite stereotyped representations of “witches” (involved in *Zar* spirit possession cults) or “malefic queens” (like the mythical ambivalent figure of *Yodit*, leading the sacking of the Axumite Kingdom at the end of the first Christian millennium).

1.3. “Traditional religions” in regional Muslim historiography

Beyond these contemporary Christian interpretations, the Muslim medieval historiography depicts an ambiguous and floating portrait of the (Oromo) “traditional” religions, across the blurry and rearticulated margins of the non-Arab “indigenous” Islamic Community in the Horn of Africa.

Source 18. Ambiguous and floating portrait of the (Oromo) “traditional” religions

“For Braukämper (2002: 160), the (Hadiya and Oromo) *awâma* appear as the ‘partisans of traditional folk religion.’ The Oromo dictionary of the *Languages Academia of the Peoples of Ethiopia* gives for *awaama*: ‘*nama amantiin isaa Kiristaana yookin Islama* hinta’in (people whose religious belief is not Christianity or Islam)” (Akkaadaamii 1996: 28). (...) This use of the term *awama* comes close to the standard Arabic-Islamic use of *al-‘awamm* (...) for a common or uneducated person (...) (Illiterate) people who are *al-awamm* are not pagans (...) (but claim) the right to live according to (their) own ‘*ada* (Oromo *aadaa*) (...) deriving from Islamic jurisprudence, under legitimate ‘customary law.’”

Thomas Zitelmann, “Oromo Religions, *Ayyaana* and the Possibility of a Sufi Legacy,” *Journal of Oromo Studies* vol. 12, no. 1–2 (2005): 91–92.

Thomas Zitelmann points out the probable proximity of central terms found in the Oromo religious tradition—like *ayyaanna* (spirit, divine presence/character) or *seera* (law)—with classical Sufi philosophies and Ibn al-‘Arabi’s theory of knowledge (pointed out by Mohammed Hassen in 2015). His socio-historical linguistic approach suggests a rereading of the Oromo religion in terms of social statuses and official religious representations.

The work of Zitelmann tends to confirm the hypothesis formulated before him by several scholars (like Cerulli, Haberland, Braükamper or Mohammed Hassen) that the Oromo “traditional religion” has never been strictly outside Islam, but rather historically rooted in ancient regional Sufi Islamic legacies and “might have at one time been derived from an Islamic heterodoxy” (Zitelmann 2005, 94) through the Sunni orthodox reformations and changing alliances of agro-pastoral federations and trade centres, throughout the socio-economic, political and religious history of the Horn of Africa—from *imam* Aḥmād’s *jihad*, to the contemporary *Salafi* or *Wahhabi* puritan movements, as demonstrated by Osmond in 2014.

2. Women’s current trajectories across Oromo religious tradition(s)

2.1. Women as “invisible” historical agents of Oromo national reformation

By ensuring state/religion separation, religious freedom and the official recognition of the diverse national cultural heritages, the current Ethiopian federal regime has encouraged the revival of “indigenous” religious traditions. For almost two decades, the institutional “renaissance” of the Oromo *Waaqeffaata* religion has been largely centred on the annual *Irreecca* (or *Irrecha*) celebration held around the Horra Lake in Däbrä Zäyt/Bishooftuu. However, as in the classical Christian and Muslim historiography, the studies of this major Oromo religious celebration remain largely centred on men’s activities and often provide limited and very general information on women’s representation.

Source 19. Definition of Irreecca (or Irrecha)

“The *Irrecha* celebration is related to the worship and thanksgiving practice of the ancient Cushitic people, the ancestors of Oromo, to their *Waaq* (God). (...) *Abba* Muda, the religious leader, (and) *Abba* Gada, the political leader (...), carry bunches of lovely grasses in their hands (...) pray to *Waaq*. The participating women dress themselves in (...) cultural dresses and carry *Siqe* (cultural women’s stick).”

Robele Tadesse, *Gada System, African Indigenous Democracy and United States of Africa* (Addis Ababa: Robele Tadesse, 2013), 11.

To overcome these long-lasting evolutionist or culturalist male-centred prejudices and critically question the controversial historical interactions with Christianity and Islam, the reexamination of women’s participation in Oromo religious tradition(s) should privilege:

- More dynamic methodological approaches
- More detailed and fieldwork-based investigations
- More transversal research objects, like the involvement of women in marriages (or matrimonial alliances), national welfare and the trans-confessional celebrations of regional saints.

2.2. Women’s ritual involvement in social unity and welfare

Until recently, the active role and responsibility of women in regional religious practices has been closely related to maintaining the peaceful unity and mutual prosperity of the Oromo agro-pastoral federations.

Far from the long-lasting clichés about women’s reproductive functions or Afro-traditionalist mother-goddess representations, the *Siique/Sinqe*, *Ateete*, *Daalalle* or *Mahram* terms rather designate various and often combined ranges of ritual objects, ceremonies, conflict resolution/reconciliation institutions and other social forms or practices of religious and political mobilisations for women’s rights recognition.

Source 20. The uses of the *sinqee*

“The *sinqee* has traditionally been used on a number of different occasions: during religious ceremonies, in particular when women go for *Ateete*—a religious women-only ceremony. Women will march to a nearby riverbank where they will pray to God. (...) *Sinqee* (is) not merely (...) a term for a material symbol, it also refers to an institution, to a women’s organization totally excluding men, which has both religious and political functions (...) (like) political mobilizations when women’s rights (...) ha(ve) been violated.”

Marit T. Østebø, “Wayyuu—Women’s Respect and Rights among the Arsi-Oromo,” in *Proceedings of the 16th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, edited by Svein Ege, Harald Aspen, Birhanu Teferra and Shiferaw Bekele (Trondheim: Norwegian University of Science and Technology, 2009), 1053.

The *Siige/Sinqe*, *Ateete*, *Daalalle* or *Mahram* corpuses, actors and practices are embedded into a series of rules regulating legal marriage contracts or officially recognised matrimonial alliances, founding, reforming or ensuring the continuity of Oromo federations—by complementing men’s responsibility in the historical implementation of changing socioeconomic partnerships and political pacts or constitutions.

Source 21. *Ateete*, a feminine divinity

“Under *Wak*, as the Most Supreme Being, stand two subordinate divinities, a masculine, *Oglie*, and a feminine, *Atetie*. They sacrifice cows and sheep to *Oglie* between the months of June and July; to *Atetie* they sacrifice in September. She is the goddess of fecundity, and women are her especial votaries. At these festivities they ask for numerous progeny, good harvests and victory over their enemies; in other respects, giving themselves over entirely to that sensual enjoyment, which is generally inseparable from heathenism. It is evident that the procreative and fructifying power of nature is expressed by the idea of these two divinities, as was the case with the ancient Egyptians who had similar notions.

Johann Ludwig Krapf and Ernsnt Georg Ravenstein, *Travels, Researches, and Missionary Labors During an Eighteen Years’ Residence in Eastern Africa* (London: Trübner, 1860), 67–68.

2.3. *Women’s representation in the celebration of trans-local/national saints*

In the same perspective, the still commonly assumed docility, passive obedience or even marginality of women in the political and religious spheres of African ‘traditional’ societies is also largely invalidated by the existence of several religious groups, which provide a formal representation of women in order to challenge and moderate the abuses of social male domination—from husband/wife family household, to *Gadaa* or *Qaalluu* political/religious institutions and public celebrations.

In the present Western Šäwa Zone, the *Mo’aata* communities designate the religious groups venerating the female saint *Demamiti*, in the rural vicinity of the towns of Ambo and Tullu Bolo. These communities mainly gather the marginal individuals—like widows, unmarried girls, sick persons or homosexuals—of the local *Kutay* coalition. This political coalition involves different Oromo kinships and territorial federations of farmers, cattle herders and *Gadaa* assemblies, under the final authority of the *Qaalluu* leaders. In this political order, *Demamiti* is formally recognised as one of the several religious figures, subordinated to the *Qaalluu*. Thus, in spite of their marginal or deviant label, the *Mo’aata* communities enjoy an official existence. They are even closely involved in the celebration of the peaceful relations among the plural actors of the *Kutay* coalition, and between their non-Oromo partners of the southern Säbat Bet Gurage federations, beyond the Awaš River.

Figure 7. Laurent Lafuma,
*A Mo’aata woman and Oromo
riders in Qaalluu’s shrine*



Figure 8. Laurent Lafuma,
*Shaalo Magarsa, the female-
male leader of the Mo’aata*



Like the Oromo *Mo’aata*, the Gurage *Me’wet* communities found from Šäwa to the Kistane’s territories venerate *Demwe’wit*, the patron saint of unmarried female teenagers and marginalised handicraft workers, gays or asocial persons in general. These *Mo’aata/Me’wet* communities also participate in the yearly ceremonies held in the main religious shrines of the *Kutay* coalitions in Western Šäwa, and those of the Gurage Säbat Bet in the present Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples’ Regional (SNNPR) State, as demonstrated by Osmond in 2016.

Shaalo Magarsa, the present leader of the Mo'aata communities in the rural vicinity of Ambo town, formulates these trans-local legacies through collective prayers, proclaiming the authority of Demamiti from the sources of the Awaš, to the southern Gurage Zone.

Though scholars often classify the Oromo and Gurage Mo'aata/Me'wet communities in the controversial category of "traditional religions," these networks of local saints still claim their historical proximity with the major Muslim Sufi orders of southeastern Ethiopia, like the shrines of Ayyoo Mommina in Arsi or Sheikh Hussein in Bale.

Source 22. Collective prayer to Demamiti

Ya bahar demamiti [Demamiti of the Sea]
Ya awash demamiti [Demamiti of Awash]
Shewa, Soddo [From Shewa, Soddo,]
Ennamor, Ennacor [Ennamor and Ennacor,]
Hullum tantarafa [She provides us with all we need]
Sebirayu! [Rejoice! (Be patient as she is coming to rescue us!)]

Collected, transcript and translated by T. Osmond.

According to Osmond, in Western Šäwa, Shaalo Magarsa and the main Mo'aata dignitaries often associate Demamiti with the term *arshi*, borrowed from the Arabic *'arsh*, designating the "Celestial Throne of Allah" in the Quran. Among the regional hierarchy of the female Muslim saints distributed along the Awaš river's southern banks, Demamiti *arshi* is often presented as the spiritual daughter or heir of Ayyoo Mommina, herself positioned under the authority of "Mother Fatuma," the daughter of Prophet Mohammed and the wife of Ali.

Source 23. Testimonies of believers

"My religious vocation (ayyaana) is embedded in the path of the Arsi House/Lady (ye arusi emmebet), also known as Shubash Karama, and above her, in the descent of Fatima's Mother-Community (ummeete/ummaata fatuma). Here (in Ambo's rural vicinities), I serve the Protector of the country, Damfa Abba Borricca ('the Boiling Father of the Brown 'Borricca' horse')."

"I am the devoted servant of the Oromo Saints (ayyaana) through my vocation into the Mo'aata family, that is all I do. (Shaalo starts singing) 'Oh Abba Jobbir (nb: a famous Oromo leader opposing the Christian Imperial authorities in the 19th-20th centuries), nobody can prevent you from slaughtering your enemies...'"

Two extracts from *Shaalo, the Voices of Mourning*, directed by Jean-Marc Lamoure and Thomas Osmond (2004; Paris: Chinguitty Films/Abderrhamane Sissako Production, 2004), DV/Super8.

Conclusion

The study of women’s involvement across the plural “(African) traditional” religions in Ethiopia is still limited by cultural clichés, inherited from these controversial non- and pre-Christian/Muslim religious categories. Overcoming these plural academic prejudices and common “mother-earth-goddess” representations requires a careful critical review of the classical Christian/Muslim secondary sources, as well as more diversified and dynamic field investigations.

The introductory quotation of Ali Birra might concretely reveal the complexity of this chapter: embedded in the ancient Sufi tradition of cyclical creation/salvation (through night/day transition), the female ‘light of dawn’ worded in this famous popular song also performs the 1960s–1970s Oromo nationalist poetry, reflecting the then “invisible” positions of women across both the “original” and updated reformations of *homelandreligions*, throughout the political and socioeconomic history of medieval and contemporary Ethiopia.

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Part 4

Women, Politics, and Social
Participation

Chapter 6

Ethiopian Christian Queens
from Medieval Times to the End
of the 19th Century

“I know I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman; but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and of a king of England”

Elizabeth I, Queen of England, “Elizabeth I’s ‘Tilbury speech,’” in Harley MS 6798, (London British Library): f. 87.

Even though the history of every Christian Queen (*nəgəśtat*) has not yet been studied, queens are the feminine characters most concentrated on in historical studies dedicated to women. This chapter focuses on noblewomen who were influential at royal court as diplomats, strategists, and protagonists in religious affairs.

1. Queens and the evolution of the monarchy during the 16th century

1.1. *From multiple wives (polygyny) to a single wife (monogamy)*

According to Herman’s articles published in 2016 and 2020, one main difference between the medieval and the post-medieval kings is their matrimonial practices. The first had five wives (*bə ʾəsitat*), all queens (*nəgəśt*) with a regnal name and they had concubines (*əqubat*) as well, while the latter group tried to respect the principle of monogamy.

Table 4. Titles of the three main queens of King Zär’a Ya’əqob (1434–1468) called Q^wästäntīnos (by M. Herman)

Baptismal Name	Regnal Name	Title	Translation	Status
Əleni	Žan Zela	<i>ite qāññ bā ʾaltiḫat</i>	Queen of the right	1st Queen
Fre Maryam	Žan Hayla	<i>ite gərṛa bā ʾaltiḫat</i>	Queen of the left	2 nd Queen
Şəyon Mogäsa	Žan Källäla	<i>ite bā ʾaltä šəḥna</i>	The young queen	The favourite Queen

Starting with King Ləbnä Dəngəl (1508–1540), matrimonial practice changed. Only one wife was recognised as queen (*nəgəst*) and given a regnal name, thereafter based on the King’s name.

Table 5. Regnal names of the kings and queens in the 16th century (by M. Herman)

King’s baptismal name	Queen’s baptismal name	King’s regnal name	Queen’s regnal name
Ləbnä Dəngəl (1508–1540)	Säblä Wängel	Wanag Sägäd	Wanag Mogäsa.
Minas (1559–1563)	Sellus Həyła	Admas Sägäd	Admas Mogäsa
Şarşa Dəngəl (1563–1597)	Maryam Sena	Malak Sägäd	Malak Mogäsa

Kings began to marry by following the religious ceremony of marriage (or *taklil*), tried to restrict themselves to monogamy and rejected concubines (except King Şarşa Dəngəl and King Iyasu I). This practice would be followed till the 18th and 19th centuries, though it was adapted slightly.

1.2. 16th century, the century of regencies

In 2015, Herman shows that while the principle of regency was introduced in the previous century, it began to become a regular system during the 16th century.

Ləbnä Dəngəl (1508–1516)	Gəlawdewos (1540–1542)	Şartsä Dəngəl (1563–1566)
In 1508, Ləbnä Dəngəl was just a child. The regency was given to his grandmother Əleni, to his mother Na’od Mogäsa and to <i>abuna</i> Marqos. However, the power was held by Queen Əleni.	Säblä Wangel became regent through absence. Stationed in Şawä, her son could not join the Portuguese in Təgre. Thus, she led soldiers to war. This delegation stopped when the king joined the regent and the army in 1543.	Säblä Wangel’s power reached its peak during her grandson’s reign, when she was chosen regent over his mother. She brought him to the throne while opposition was growing and acted as regent until 1565.

1.3. The creation of the title of *Itege** or *Etege**

The influence of Queen Əleni during the reign of Ləbnä Dəngəl (1508–1540) and of Queen Säblä Wangel in the 16th century, caused legislators to create a new title. According to Herman, it is during the reign of Minäs (1559–1563), the title of *Itege** was made official. Säblä Wangel became the highest queen at court, surpassing the king’s wife and was designated regent. The *Itege* was considered “Mother of the kingdom,” a distinction that gave her more influence than any other queen, becoming the second highest ranking personage after the king, and she kept her title until she died; previously this had been a king’s privilege. All *Etege* (or *Itege*) were then held in great respect.

Source 24. Definition of the title of *Etege*

“It is observed that as long as the Emperor’s mother lives, if she was Empress and wife to the Emperor deceased, the wife of the Emperor actually reigning is not called *Ethiē*, but that Honor is always given to the Old One; insomuch that not only the wife of the new Emperor, but he himself, though he be not her son, calls her Mother, and Honors her as if she were really so.”

Balthazar Tellez, *The Travels of the Jesuits in Ethiopia* (London: Kessinger Publishing, 2009[1710]), 52.

2. The political role of queens in Ethiopian history

2.1. Advisers to kings

Queens often advised kings in making political decisions. Mäsqäl Kəbra, the wife of King Lalibāla (12th century) is said to have persuaded the king to abdicate in favour of his nephew. But, when she discovered that he had mistreated a farmer, she told her husband to take the throne back.

Source 25. The qualities of Queen Əleni

“She (Əleni) was accomplished in everything: in front of God by practicing righteousness and having strong faith, by praying and receiving Holy Communion; in worldly terms, she was accomplished in preparing food [for the royal table], in familiarity with the books, in knowledge of the law, and in understanding the affairs of state. For these qualities, the King greatly loved our Queen Əleni. He considered her like his own mother.”

Jules Perruchon, *Chronique de Zar’a Ya’eqob et Ba’eda Maryam* (Paris: E. Bouillon, 1893), 175–76.

Queen Əleni, the wife of King Zār’a Ya’əqob, advised four kings from Bā’əḍā Maryam (1468–1478) till the regency of her great grandson Ləbnā Dəngəl (1508–1540). Her longevity helped her become one of the main characters of the court, till she died in 1524 (Herman 2020).

Between 1730 and 1769, *Ətege** Məntəwwab, exercised power for, and with, her son and grandson. She became the most influential character of the 18th century. She governed the kingdom with her son, King Iyasu II (1730–55), as the official chronicle of their reign describes. Məntəwwab, with her family the *Qʷaräññočč*, followed a policy of conciliation by appointing her close relatives to the central government. She also used her daughters to organise dynastic alliances with powerful regional lords to maintain peace. However, the distant provinces were left alone and acquired greater independence. James Bruce testified to her great achievements.

A century after, in 1883, Taytu Bəṭul married the King of Šäwa who became *nəguṣä nəgäšt* (king of kings) with the reigning name of Mənəlik II in 1889. In her turn, she was crowned *Ətege*, receiving the official title of “Light of



Figure 9. The seal of Taytu

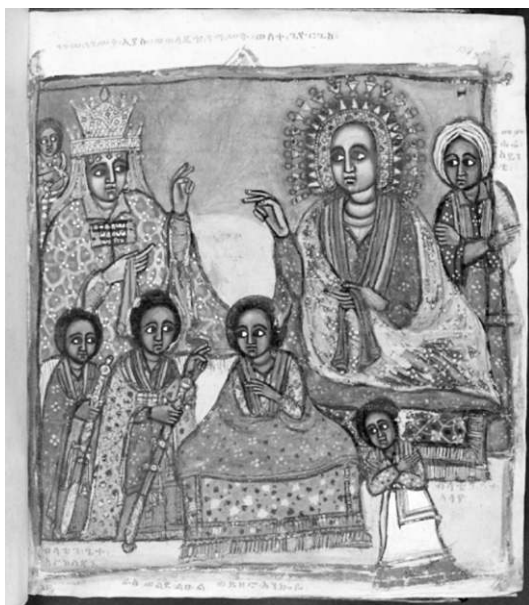


Figure 10. A depiction of royal government. *Portraits of Iyasu and Walatta Giyorgis*

Ethiopia.” Taytu was a close adviser to her husband. She encouraged the king to move the capital from *ጂጥጥ* to a lower altitude around the hot springs of Finfine. She also managed her vast estates with expertise. She directed the huge organisation required to feed and provide drink for thousands of soldiers and officers at the banquets. When Məṇəlik’s health began to decline around 1906, Taytu began to make decisions on his behalf, angering her rivals for power by her appointment of favourites and relatives to most of the positions of power and influence. For the doctor Mérab, Taytu almost became the ruler of Ethiopia. Then, excluded from power, she retired in a monastery.

Source 26. Queen Taytu and the imperial authority

“After the proclamation announcing the guardianship and the regency of *Ras Bitwoded Tessema*, Empress Taytu took the imperial authority in her hands and started making appointments and demotions in the name of His Majesty Emperor Menelik. For example, she demoted *Dejazmatch* Demis Nesibu and appointed *Ras Bitwoded Mengesha* in his place as governor of Wollega. It was at that time that she also appointed other persons. The measures taken by the Empress were not appreciated by the Regent. (...)

After she finished her reprimand, she told them that she would not involve herself in the affairs of the government, and that she had thereby surrendered her authority.”

Mers'ê Hazen Wolde Qirqos, *Of What I Saw and Heard: the Last Years of Emperor Menelik II & the Brief Rule of Iyasu* (Addis Ababa: Centre français des études éthiopiennes & Zama Publishers, 2004), 54, 66.

2.2. Diplomats

In the 16th century, Əleni foresaw the Christian state's growing difficulties with its Muslim coastal neighbours. She sought an alliance with Portugal, then a major power in the Indian Ocean. Thus, she sent a letter with an Armenian trader, Mateus, who, after many vicissitudes, delivered the letter to the Portuguese king. Mateus left Portugal in 1517 with the Rodrigo da Lima Embassy to offer Ləbnä Dəngəl some assistance against the incursions of the Adäl warriors. However, the young king, ignoring Əleni's advice, had gone into battle and been victorious, defeating Mähfūz, Aḥmad's chief minister. Continuing to ignore Əleni, at first Ləbnä Dəngəl showed little interest in obtaining Portuguese help. Later, he would however call them back for help.

Source 27. Queen Əleni, the father and mother of all

“They said that since she had died all of them had died, great and small, and that while she lived, all lived and were defended and protected; and she was the father and mother of all. (...) It might be eight or nine months after the death of Queen Elena, who reigned over the greater part of Goïame (Goğğam), that still as many as came to the Court went to weep at her tent, which was still pitched in its place.”

Francisco Alvares, in G. W. B. Huntingford and C. F. Beckingham, *The Prester John of the Indies: A True Relation of the Lands of the Prester John, being the narrative of the Portuguese Embassy to Ethiopia in 1520* (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1961), vol. 2, 434.

At the end of the 19th century, Taytu provided a counterbalance to Mənəlik who, she considered, was too trusting of the foreigners plotting at his court. In 1890, there was a dispute between Italy and Ethiopia over the Treaty of Wuchale. Article 17 had two different meanings in the Amharic and Italian versions. The Amharic version recognised the sovereignty of Ethiopia and its relationship with Italy as a diplomatic partnership, while the Italian version made Ethiopia Italy's protectorate. Taytu was the first to encourage the

hesitant king to stand up against this. To the Italian envoy, Count Antoneli, Ṭaytu said: “We also have our dignity to preserve. You wish Ethiopia to be represented before other powers as your protectorate, but this shall never be.” Finally, in 1896, Mənəlik decided to confront the Italians. Ṭaytu took part in the war and brought 3,000 of her own troops to Adwa. The ensuing victory brought about the downfall of the Italian Government.

2.3. *A religious role*

The references to queens in the *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica* show that they have always had an influence on the affairs of the church. In the 12th century, Mäsqäl Kəbra succeeded in persuading the head of the Ethiopian Church to ordain her brother, Hirun, as bishop. She is counted among the Ethiopian saints. In the 17th century, Wäld Sa’ala, the wife of King Susneyos, fought strongly against the Jesuits and helped the kingdom to return to orthodoxy. In the 18th century, Məntəwwab, a partisan of the *Qebat* movement, reconciled the two major monastic orders, who had for centuries engaged in bitter disputes over church doctrine.

Queens also built major churches in Ethiopia. Mäsqäl Kəbra built the church of Abba Libanos in Lalibäla. In the 16th century, Queen Əleni, a former Muslim, built a main church in Goğğam, Märtulä Maryam. It was built using stone and wood, with two *tabotat* (altar stones) of gold.

Source 28. The richness of the church of Märtulä Maryam

“I quote what he [Pero da Covilhao*] told me and I think he would tell the truth: that he had gone by order of Queen Elena to show how an altar should be made in this kingdom (...) and they made this altar of wood and crammed it all full of [solid] gold, and also the altar stone was of solid gold. (...) There was a big guard at that church, who guarded it on account of the great amount of gold that was in it.”

Francisco Alvares, in G. W. B. Huntingford and C. F. Beckingham, *The Prester John of the Indies...* (op. cit.), vol. 2: 459.

* Pero da Covilhao was a long-time Portuguese resident at court who had arrived in Ethiopia around 1507 and stayed until he died.

“The ornaments were very rich. There were some chalices and patens of gold of great weight, and two altar stones of solid gold (...) I am a witness of this for they were saved (...) and came into the hands of Emperor Seltan Cegued [Susnəyos], who kept them in our house, spending them on restoring this church.”

Manoel d’Almeida, in G. W. B. Huntingford and C. F. Beckingham, *Some Records of Ethiopia, 1593-1646* (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1954), 103–8.

In the 18th century, as shown by Bosc-Tiessé, Məntəwwab was a great patron of the arts and literature, financing the building of many fine churches and stimulating the production of richly illuminated manuscripts and paintings.

She built several significant edifices in Gondär, like the complex called Däbrä Sahāy Qwəsqwam which included a palace and a church and she protected the Greek and Syrian artisans employed on palace building. She endowed the library of the church with 68 volumes, three of which were illuminated. In 1747, she then built a church on Lake Ṭana, called Narga Səllase, becoming the first queen to build a royal foundation on the Lake.



Figure 11. Margaux Herman,
Qwəsqwam Palace in Gondär

In the 19th century, Ṭaytu was educated, could read and write Amharic and *gəʾəz*. She composed religious poetry and played the *begenä*, a royal lyre. She sponsored the copying of religious books and ordered her own copy of the *Miracle of Mary*. She cared a lot for Jerusalem as she was in charge of “the department of Jerusalem affairs.” She founded the church of ሉቃስ Maryam.

Conclusion

Queens were not simply royal spouses. They played a major role on the political stage and their roles appear increasingly in royal chronicles, a proof of their growing power in politics and the religious sphere. They advised the kings, had a role to play in diplomatic affairs and in the religious sphere and were also involved in the succession process while the kings were being chosen. Their longevity at court helped them to influence the destiny of the country and they left their footprint on the Ethiopian landscape and history by building churches and palaces and writing or sponsoring religious books and arts. Many studies and biographical works need to be done on these women of the political sphere to illuminate all their achievements and deeds that have been left to one side or usurped by their male counterparts.

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Chapter 7

The Woman Question in the Ethiopian Student Movement

“As university students, the word ‘gender’ meant to us nothing more than a grammatical term. In fact, it was then known not as such but the ‘Woman Question’”

Netsanet Mengistu, “The Gender Question,”
in Bahru Zewde (2010, 117).

There have been some remarkable women in Ethiopian history. As queens, queen mothers or sometimes military leaders, they have left their mark on the country’s history. Names such as Queen Ḫeleni, *Ḫtege** Məntəwwab and Taytu easily spring to mind. But this is not the entire story about women. The majority of Ethiopian women have toiled under the heavy burden of domestic chores, serving their husbands and children and their voices scarcely heard. This chapter tells the story of those who stood on the side of the oppressed and silent majority and waged a campaign for their liberation. In particular, it shows how the woman question came to be an important agenda item in the struggle of Ethiopian students in the 1970s.

1. The settings of women’s participation in the student movement

1.1. *The precursors*

Expression of social concern on women’s condition and roles was seen in the early 20th century. The weekly newspaper *Berhanena Salam* served as the main forum where the first educated Ethiopians campaigned for social reform. While the most famous intellectuals of the period, such as Gäbrä Heywat Baykadagn, Täklä Hawaryat Täklä Maryam, or Afäwarq Gäbrä Iyyasus, did not show any particular concern for the fate of women, Heruy Walda Sellase at least argued for the right of women to choose their husbands in one of his novels; the prevalent practice was for parents to choose the spouses for their sons and daughters. Even more outspoken was a columnist by the name of Amsala Tebab Walda-Ab, who gave an eloquent response to a writer who had written a critique of Ethiopian women regarding their lack of modernity. She argued that it is their husbands who have to be blamed for their wives’

conservatism, as society would consider them too shameless were they to adopt modern ways. In order for the wives to be liberated, she argued, the husbands themselves need to be liberated from their outmoded views.

1.2. The Ethiopian student movement

The Ethiopian student movement, which advocated social and political change for nearly a decade and half (from 1961 to 1974), was a powerful student movement. For about a decade, it challenged the imperial regime, campaigning for freedom and social justice. The two most important questions it raised were the land question and the question of nationalities. Thus, in 1965, students came out onto the streets with the slogan of “Land to the Tiller.” In 1969, for the first time they raised the subject of the oppression of nationalities in Ethiopia and argued for the principle of “self-determination up to and including secession.” In conjunction with the question of nationalities, they also raised “the woman question.”

Ethiopia has generally been a highly patriarchal society. In other words, men were more important than women; husbands were more powerful than wives; sons were more privileged than daughters. A good example of this is how men came to dominate even a women’s organisation such as the Ethiopian Women’s Welfare Association (የኢትዮጵያ ሴቶች በጎ አድራጊነት ማኅበር). All the officers elected to lead the organisation in 1956 were men!

2. Women’s participation in the student movements

2.1. Early challenges

Even within the student movement, what has now come to be characterised as male chauvinism (የወንድ ትምክህተኝነት) prevailed until the late 1960s. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the Debating Society of the University College of Addis Ababa could organise debates on topics such as “Is Emancipation of Women Beneficial to Society?” or “Higher Education for Women is Undesirable.” Throughout the 1960s, what came to be known as “the Battle of the Sexes” raged in student newspapers. Female students were subjected to attacks and ridicule. While they had their male defenders, some of them also fought back with their own responses (see Source 29). A good example is that of a female student who composed a poem ridiculing men.

Even in the second half of the 1960s, after radical students came to take control of the student movement with the establishment of the University Students’ Union of Addis Ababa (USUAA), female students were harassed and jeered at. USUAA’s publication, *Struggle*, carried cartoons caricaturing female students. A Miss USUAA contestant fell to her death as she tried to escape a male student trying to molest her. Waleign Makonnen, who symbolised student radicalism more than any other student, wrote an article attacking female students because, under the leadership of their American

Source 29. Poem of an anonymous female student

"If you smile at him, he thinks you're flirty;
If you don't, he thinks you're an iceberg;
If you let him kiss you, he wishes you were more reserved;
If you don't, he seeks consolation elsewhere; ...
If you go around with other fellows, he thinks you are fickle;
If you don't, he thinks no one else will have you;
Men! God bless them! You can't get along with them,
But what would the basketball team do without them?"
Poem ridiculing men written by a female student using the pen name "a Sabean"
(after the name of the female students' hostel, Saba Hall).

Bahru Zewde. *The Quest for Socialist Utopia: The Ethiopian Student Movement c. 1960–1974*
(Suffolk: James Currey, 2015), 223.

counsellor, they had organised an event (called "Fashion Tea") coinciding with the University Day, when students usually expressed their opposition to the regime through poems and theatrical performances. This formed the prelude to the violent protests that students waged against the fashion show that was organised in 1968. The two radical students whom female students remembered as being supportive of their cause were Tilahun Gizaw, who was USUAA president in 1969/70 until he was assassinated by government security agents in December 1969, and Yohannes Berhane, who later joined the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP) and was killed during the *Därg's* "search and destroy" operation in early 1970.

When we look at female representation in student organisations as well, we see that there were few female students. Only one female student managed to be elected to the USUAA Congress. There were hardly any female students in the executive committees of student organisations either at home or abroad. This formed the background to the formation of an organisation particularly concerned with women's affairs. Such is the genesis of the World Wide Ethiopian Women's Study Group (WWEWSG).

2.2. *Women's Study Group*

The main argument of the students in forming the study group was that women suffered double oppression (ድርብ ጭቆና in Amharic), the first as members of the working class or the peasantry and the second as women. Indeed, in cases where women belonged to oppressed nationalities, they were even said to suffer triple oppression (ድርብ ድርብ ጭቆና). Thus, because of this unique condition of women, it was felt that women should have their own organisations to fight for their cause. Although, there were some debates within the student movement on the necessity of a separate women's organisation, eventually it came to be accepted by almost all students. The person mainly

involved in creating the group was Abebech Bekele, an activist within the Ethiopian Student Union in North America (ESUNA), who became president of WWEWSG. As it turned out, she also became the first woman to assume the high office of President of the World Wide Federation of Ethiopian Students (WWFES) when it was established in April 1973. Abebech got her idea about the need to form a separate organisation for women from her interactions with members of the militant African-American rights group, the Black Panthers. She also got moral support from radical students like Mesfin Habtu, Abdul Mohammed and Benyam Adane.

WWEWSG had two main branches, one in Europe and another in North America, both which started their activities in 1971. By 1975, it had a total of 95 members. The Group started publishing its own journal in 1972. It was initially called ተነሽ ላብአደሪት (“Arise, Ye Female Proletarian”) but later changed to ተነሽ ኢትዮጵያዊት (“Arise, Ye Female Ethiopian”) to make it more inclusive. Articles that appeared in the journal outlined the historical evolution of female oppression, the role of educated women in Ethiopia and a biographical profile of Marta Mebratu.

Marta Mebratu had emerged as the symbol of female student activism. She was a medical student at Haile Selassie I University with a bright future career ahead of her. She chose instead to dedicate her life to struggle against the regime. Her tall stature, afro hairdo and general appearance was very much like that of the great African-American civil rights activist, Angela Davis. Marta met her tragic end in 1972 when she tried to hijack an Ethiopian Airlines international passenger airplane with six other accomplices, including Walegn Makonnen. She was one of the six killed in midair by anti-hijackers. The sole survivor was another female student, Tadelech Kidane Maryam.

Throughout the early 1970s, “the woman question” came to be an important issue in the student movement, particularly in its external wing. Thus, the 11th Congress of the Ethiopian Student Union in Europe (ESUE), which debated the national question and finally passed the famous resolution supporting self-determination up to and including secession, simultaneously passed resolutions on the woman question. These resolutions reaffirmed the double oppression of women and their right to a separate organisation to fight that oppression. Organs of the student movement also carried substantive articles on the woman question. For instance, the November 1973 issue of *Challenge*, the organ of ESUNA, carried a 46-page article on the subject.

Conclusion

Thus, after an initial war of words between male and female students, the Ethiopian student movement took up the woman question as an important component of its struggle. Women set up their own separate organisation, WWEWSG, to study the condition of women and to struggle for their



Figure 12. Marta Mebratu.
Photograph. *Tanash*
Ityopyawit, Yakatit 1965
E.C (February 1973)

rights. The president of that organisation even rose to become the president of the global umbrella student organisation, WWFES. Marta Mebratu best symbolised the dedication and spirit of sacrifice of female students alongside their male counterparts.

At the end of the day, however, women's organisations did not enjoy full independence. They became a battleground for rival male-dominated political organisations. This was the case before the 1974 revolution, as the rival clandestine organisations, EPRP and *Ma'ison*, vied for control of WWEWSG. The struggle continued after the revolution as they competed for control of the coordinating committee set up by the *Därg* to organise women. After it liquidated both EPRP and *Ma'ison* in 1976–77, the *Därg* coopted the woman question and completely neutralized it by setting up a satellite organisation, Revolutionary Ethiopian Women's Association (REWA) (see chapter 4.3).

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Chapter 8

Women's Political Participation from 1974 to 1993

“Women belong in all places where decisions are being made... It shouldn't be that women are the exception.”

Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Interview. By Joan Biskupic, *USA TODAY*, May 6, 2009.

Women only gained the right to vote in the 1940s and waited until 1955 to receive the right to be elected to parliament. The first female parliamentarian, *wäyzäro** Sənəddu Gäbru (ሰንደግ ገብረ), was elected in 1957. In 1965 and 1969, there were two and five female members of parliament, respectively, but in 1974 the number fell to four. Moreover, during the imperial regime, the most visible active women participants in the public sphere were wives of military officers, nobles and princes. However, in the course of the 1974 revolution and thereafter, women began to participate in the socio-political activities of the country. Women were involved in the student movements to create an environment conducive for their empowerment (see chapter 4.2). This chapter focuses on the place of women and their political participation during the *Därg* regime.

1. Ethiopian Women's Coordinating Committee (EWCC) and other women's associations

1.1. February 1974

February 1974 is a historical period in Ethiopian history where many female students, teachers, factory workers, women in the informal sector, and Muslim women joined an uprising against the monarchy. People demanded democratic rights such as religious freedom, women's rights, the right to organise and the economic right of “land for the tillers” through continuous demonstrations and boycotts. During the demonstrations, women carried banners demanding gender equality measures such as “equal pay,” “equal rights for women,” “paid maternity leave,” “the right to organise,” “the right to property,” and so on. What makes the February uprising unique is that peasant women also joined hands with men. Thus, the uprising was very significant for

Ethiopian women as they dealt the first and most important challenge to the patriarchal belief that women have no business participating in public affairs; however, a military government known as *Därg* took power and shattered the Ethiopian people's aspiration for democratic order.

1.2. *The creation of the Ethiopian Women's Coordinating Committee (EWCC) in February 1975*

At the beginning of its rule, the *Därg* tried to address some of the demands of the people. For instance, as people demanded "land to the tiller," land reform was declared in March 1975, where land was nationalised and distributed to the farmers; but women were not included in the distribution. The *Därg* also wanted to set up women's organisations and held a seminar in 1975 where about 55 women were in attendance, representing government and non-governmental organisations, and they discussed various gender issues. The members at the seminar agreed to plan for a women's association that advocated for women's equality. Therefore, an organising committee, the Ethiopian Women's Coordinating Committee (EWCC) with a membership of 18 women was set up. The mandates of EWCC were to: (a) raise political consciousness among women in the rural and urban areas; (b) prepare publications and distribute them to the general public; (c) disseminate research outcomes and information pertaining to women through the mass media; (d) organise seminars, conferences and discussion forums regarding gender issues. The first action of the committee was therefore to set up branches in factories, government and non-government organisations, etc.

In April 1975, EWCC held a second seminar for two weeks where about 300 women participated as representatives of different organisations, the informal sectors including commercial sex workers, homemakers (housewives), domestic workers and interested individuals. In the end, an agreement was reached to establish a women's organization and increase the number of members of EWCC; this was enlarged from 18 to 25.

Source 30. Interview of Gennet Zewide

"I remember a very moving play by women workers from the Berhanena Selam Printing Press which showed how women workers were inhumanly treated. In the play, a woman was pleading with her boss to give her permission to take her seriously sick son to a hospital. The response she gets from the boss was: 'You women are like rabbits who do nothing else but produce babies.' The play was a reflection of the view of many employers regarding women workers."

Interview of Gennet Zewide, in Gennet Zewide, *Resistance, Freedom and Empowerment: the Ethiopian Women's Struggle* (New Delhi: Concept Pub. Co., 2014), 84.

In March 1976, EWCC held the first-ever celebration of March 8, International Women's Day in Ethiopia which took place over three days. The venue of the celebration was *Meskel* Square. Poems were read, dramas performed, photo exhibitions were set up, and demonstrations were held. Discussions on the women's situation in Ethiopia took place among female students' organisations both at home and abroad though they had limited audiences. In any case, EWCC succeeded in adding women to the political agenda of Ethiopia, albeit limited to the urban areas.



Figure 13. Pro Därg Official, International Women's Day rally, 1978

1.3. *The use of "zämäch'a" as a platform to create awareness about "women's issues"*

The *Därg* declared "Land to the Tiller" with Proclamation Number 26/1975 and abolished tenancy by nationalising all rural land. *IdgätbäHibrätzämäch'a* usually referred to as *zämäch'a* or "Development Through Cooperation Campaign" was initiated to create awareness about "Ethiopian Socialism." Thus, all senior secondary schools as well as higher education institutions were closed and their students, teachers and administrators were sent to the rural areas to participate in the campaign.

Using the *zämäch'a* as a handy platform, the female students who were exposed to EWCC's advocacy took the opportunity to sensitise women in the rural areas where they had been assigned. Thus, some female students raised and discussed issues about women's equality in their awareness creation or

sensitisation programmes. Though the issues were not discussed in detail, the fact that women's rights had to be respected in society was raised by female students in some of the remotest corners of the country. I (the author) was informed by female students who participated in the campaign that they wanted to initiate a national mass women's movement; however, they were not able to effect change as their numbers were small.

Because of its advocacy and organising activists, EWCC galvanised many women in the urban areas (Addis Ababa, a few other cities and in factories) to rally and articulate the issues of women's rights and equality. However, the activities of EWCC made the *Därg* uncomfortable as some members of its leadership (including the chairperson) were members of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP) which opposed the *Därg* and called for a "Provisional People's Government." Consequently, as the campaign for the leadership gained support and control of EWCC, the *Därg* launched fierce repression against the EWCC leadership. Thus, some of the leaders went underground, others were imprisoned and few of them were murdered, and eventually it was abolished.

1.4. *The Revolutionary Ethiopian Women's Association (REWA) in 1980*

In July 1980, the *Därg* set up its own women's organisation known as the Revolutionary Ethiopian Women's Association (REWA). The objectives of the association were (a) to make women politically and economically independent; (b) to safeguard their rights and so on. Nevertheless, they could not be achieved, as women did not have the power to set their own agenda. Still, REWA helped to popularise the view that special measures were needed to address women in the society. For instance, Ethiopia signed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1987. Women were to some extent allowed to organise themselves beyond domestic affairs, which challenged tradition.

Source 31. REWA and its lacks of role towards women rights

"The promotion of women's rights issues was not part of REWA's agenda, nor was REWA in any position to influence any policy regarding women's rights."

Christopher Clapham, *Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 139.

The participation of women in many associations, though under state control, helped many of them to be aware and knowledgeable about public affairs, and some started their own businesses. However, the government's concern was more to educate women in its political ideology.

In the same manner, while REWA involved an unprecedented number of women being concerned about their rights, they were forced into membership

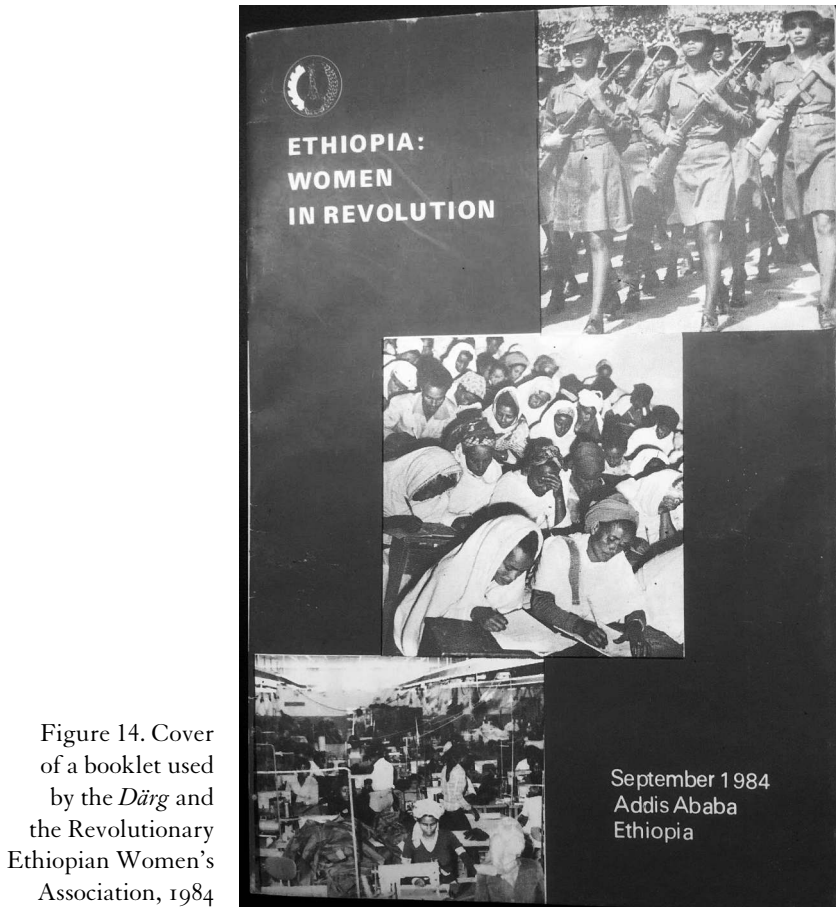


Figure 14. Cover of a booklet used by the *Därg* and the Revolutionary Ethiopian Women's Association, 1984

where they had to attend the meetings. In fact, as soon as REWA was created, all other independent women's associations were banned. However, though women were organised under REWA, not many women came to high political positions. In 1987, there were no women among the government's 20 ministers, and only one female vice-minister.

2. Women's struggle against the *Därg* Regime

During the *Därg*, many women joined secretive (underground) political parties also taking up arms despite "The Red Terror" that lasted from September 1976 to May 1978.

2.1. Secretive Political Parties and Women's Struggles (EPRP, EWOS and AESM)

Despite the regime's restrictive policies, secretive political parties and organisations proliferated. Most of them had left-oriented ideology and included "women's questions" on their agenda. As a result, young women, mostly

Source 32. Only one woman member in the WPE

“By 1987 no woman in the post-revolutionary period had surpassed the rank reached before the revolution, and the proportion of women in important positions remained at least as low as before 1974. (...) “Although Addis Ababa in 1984 had over 52,000 more women than men and 33.6 percent of households had female heads, the representation of women among *kebele* leaders seemed at least as meager as on the Central Committee. Among the 136 full members of the original WPE (Worker’s Party of Ethiopia) Central Committee there was only one woman who was married to a WPE regional first secretary. She was put in charge of women’s affairs in the WPE central secretariat.”

Christopher Clapham *Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia* (op. cit.), 138–39.

university and high school students, joined them. Many members of the banned EWCC joined the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Party (EPRP) while others joined the All Ethiopian Socialist Movement (AESM). The women members of EPRP organised a women’s wing of the party named the Ethiopian’s Women’s Organization for Struggle (EWOS), which expanded to most parts of Ethiopia. EWOS had a monthly paper called ድርብታጋጭ meaning “the one that fights against the dual oppression of women,” that produced articles on gender relations. EWOS was a left-oriented organisation which propagated the idea that the abolition of class struggles would pave the way for the abolition of women’s oppression. Study circles were also organised in universities, high schools, factories, towns and even villages where the causes of women’s oppression and the nature of the struggle were discussed.

2.2. *The life of women and children in detention*

During the period of “The Red Terror,” women, as well as men, regardless of age, economic conditions and ethnicity were imprisoned. Some were pregnant, others were nursing mothers, and even elderly women were imprisoned for hiding their children from security forces and were labelled “anti-revolutionary.” Women were physically and mentally tortured with no medical treatment. As visiting restrooms was allowed only twice a day, many women developed urinary tract infections. However, inmates supported each other mentally and materially by sharing with each other clothes, food, and milk for children. As men were not allowed to come into the women’s section of the prison children born and raised in prisons became scared of men. During research for my book, I interviewed many imprisoned women like Saba Kidane Mariam, who spent five years in detention without natural light in the prison called Military Police (see Source 33). Gifty Abeseya also gave birth in prison without any medical facilities, while being mistreated by the



Figure 15. EPRP Ethiopian Women demonstration in 1976 (Goh Magazine)

guards during labour. She raised her child there till he was two and a half years old.

Source 33. Saba Kidane Mariam

“Like most political prisoners, Saba is now working for women’s empowerment on women’s health heading an NGO (IPAS) and Gifty has held many responsible positions in both Oromiya Regional and Federal Governments heading the Women’s Bureau, as State Minister of The Ministry of Women and Ministry of Culture and holding an ambassadorial post in Ghana.”

Gennet Zewide, *Resistance, Freedom and Empowerment: the Ethiopian Women’s Struggle* (op. cit.), 97–102.

However, not all prisoners were lucky enough to be released. Some were killed after a lengthy imprisonment, while others within a few days of detention without due legal process. Azeb Girma a university student was killed after seven months of detention in the Third Police Station. Daro Negash, a Labour Union leader of Berhanena Selam Printing Press and a member of the EWCC, was nine months pregnant when she was detained and brutally murdered, along with other members of the Labour Union. Other militant women preferred to commit suicide instead of being detained and tortured to protect the secrets and members of their organisation. For example,

the case of Nigest Teffera, the chairperson of the EWCC, and an undercover agent of the EPRP and EWOS who took a cyanide pill that she always had with her when she was apprehended by the *Kebele* guards. These stories demonstrate women's commitment to fight for a cause they believed in. Most of those who escaped prison changed their form of resistance by joining the armed struggle.

3. Women in arms

With the curtailment of many rights, the opportunity for peaceful resistance was diminished; thus, many political organisations took up arms to fight the military government in the absence of other alternatives. Unlike the societal view that women are not capable of fighting with arms, many of them joined the armed struggle waged by many organisations. However, the degree of participation by women in the organisation depended on the political view of the organisations regarding women's equality.

3.1. *From peaceful resistance to armed struggle*

The two main organisations that women joined in large numbers were *Tigray People's Liberation Front* (TPLF) and the *Amhara National Democratic Movement* (ANDM). They started resistance in different localities of Northern Ethiopia until they established the *Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front* (EPRDF) in 1990, which took the fight to the rest of Ethiopia. During the armed struggle that lasted about seventeen years, women joined the movement. Out of the 37 founding members of ANDM, two were women: Gennet Tadesse and Assefash Tassew. Eight months after the formation of TPLF, a peasant woman called Kahassi joined the organisation. A few months later, many women dropped out of university and high school to join the army. Kahassi was renamed Marta, in memory of Martha Mebratu (also referred as Marta Mebratu) (see Chapter 4.2). Thereafter, thousands of women joined both organisations.

3.2. *The creation of a women's organisation in the army*

Source 34. Netsanet Asefaw

"Netsanet Asefaw, a woman fighter, narrates that the incidence of early marriage decreased since land was distributed to those who were over 17 years old, and men want to marry women with the land. Divorce also decreased since men started to respect women and safeguard their marriage lest they lose half of their land if they were to divorce."

Zewide, Interview of Netsanet Asefaw, in Gennet Zewide, *Resistance, Freedom and Empowerment: The Ethiopian Women's Struggle* (op. cit.), 121–22.

The women members of the organisations mentioned above set up women's organisations within the army. The members of the association were not only women members of the army but also women in the areas where the army operated, as well as the "liberated" areas

Therefore, both the TPLF and the ANDM included women's challenges in their programs as societal problems that needed to be tackled. In distributing land to the farmers in the areas which the army "liberated", women had equal access and control of land and other properties, which changed their lives. Moreover, the laws enacted in the "liberated" areas acknowledged the equal rights of women to vote or be elected to any office, the right to organisation, education and the entitlement to marriage based on the consent of both parties. Few women were elected to political posts such as district administration or military leadership (commanders and commissioners at the war front). Women also served as members and/or chairs of law and justice committees.

3.3. *Challenges faced by women fighters within the struggle*

The few rights women achieved did not come easily. They still had to face the gendered challenges from the chauvinistic attitudes of the male fighters. Like men, women had to walk for long hours through the mountainous terrains of northern Ethiopia carrying rifles and ammunition, as well as brave hours of hunger and thirst. Some of their activities were: (a) Mobilising the peasant and town dwellers (b) Engaging in political and military training (c) Providing health care services to the wounded and the sick, etc. Most women fighters withstood the challenges they encountered on the frontline because of their gender. For instance, since pregnant women were not allowed to be in the frontline, some never revealed their pregnancy, since fighting on the war front was regarded as an honorable contribution to the cause.

Source 35. Netsanet Aberra speaks about Serkalem

Serkalem was 16 to 20 weeks pregnant when she was captured by government soldiers during a battle. They were delighted to have a pregnant woman in custody thinking that she would easily give all the secrets of the organization. However, under repeated torture, she kept saying "I am a daughter of EPDM, a democratic organization; I have nothing to tell you, you fascists kill me as your job is to kill people." Finally, they killed her.

Interview with Netsanet Aberra, In Gennet Zewide, *Resistance, Freedom and Empowerment: The Ethiopian Women's Struggle* (op. cit.), 125.

3.4. *Mothers' shouting "UTA" and providing shelter*

Many mothers (housewives) joined and supported their children in the fight against the *Därg*. The Ethiopian Mother's Association (EMA), a relatively

radical (clandestine) women's association, emerged during the time of the EPRP-led Women's Committee in 1976. They expressed their support in many ways. In many localities of Addis Ababa, they organised themselves and warned their children whenever the *Kebele* Guards came to their neighbourhoods to arrest the so-called "counterrevolutionaries" by making loud "UUTA" (outcries) together, a sound also used to call attention when atrocities were carried out. In towns and in rural areas, they provided hideouts for the fighters, often without the knowledge of their husbands. The women also gathered information from their neighbourhoods, or from peasants for the organisations. While some prepared dry rations, others opened their houses as meeting and hiding places. Many encouraged their children (male and female) to join the armed struggle gave their blessings, though, they were well aware that they might not survive the war. Some "mothers," like Berhane Abera, left everything behind, including their husbands, to join the armed struggle; she went along with some members of her family, including her seven children one of whom was a 5-year-old boy.

Source 36. Berhane Abera

"When I asked 'Mother' (here, Berhan Abera) about her feelings when she learned about the death of her daughter, her response was: 'As a mother, I felt very sad and had to go to a very remote place away from everybody and cried my heart out. I still feel sad whenever I remember her, but I am very proud of her and other martyrs. It is because of the sacrifice of their lives that we are living in peace now. I have neither remorse nor guilt about her death.' What a powerful commitment of seeking peace!"

Interview of Berhane Abera, in Gennet Zewide. *Resistance, Freedom and Empowerment: The Ethiopian Women's Struggle* (op. cit.), 114–15.

Conclusion

Women have been discriminated against as they were confined to the domestic role in a patriarchal ideology where the public and political role was reserved for men. Many women also believed that they did not have the abilities and temperament to become involved in politics. However, the political activism of women in Ethiopia since 1974 has demonstrated their competence, endurance of hardship, and commitment to what they believed in. Ethiopian women fought for their recognition either within, or against the regime. Therefore, after 17 years of struggle, women appear to be social, political and economic actors who cannot be ignored in any government.

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Gennet Zewide
Margaux Herman

Chapter 9

A Review of Constitutional and Legal Changes Relating to the Political Participation of Women (1993–2018)

“Our women ministers will disprove the old adage that women can’t lead,” Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, 2018.

Elias Meseret, “Ethiopia’s new Cabinet 50 percent women, including defense,” *APNews*, October 16, 2018.

The defeat of the previous regime ushered in a new era in Ethiopia that was conducive to the theoretical women’s political participation under the new regime of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia in 1995 led by the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). The third phase of women’s engagement in the public sphere (from 1991 to the present) is currently referred to as the “intangible shift.” One important provision began with the “National Policy on Women” of September 1993, referred to as the Women’s Policy. In the 1995 Constitution, Article 25 guarantees equality before the law and prohibits gender discrimination, while Article 35 clearly states women’s full right to participate in national development policies. Implicitly, gender mainstreaming is at the heart of this provision. However, as in many countries in Africa and Latin America, although the transition to a democratic political system offers new spaces for women’s participation, the process takes time and the transition from theoretical frameworks to implementation is slow. The analysis of its implementation is of great importance and still needs to be studied. As women’s empowerment and leadership is a broad topic that has never been analysed in a historical perspective, this chapter is therefore restricted to an overview of the constitutional and legal changes related to women’s political participation and decision-making in Ethiopia’s highest institutions, paving the way for future analysis.

1. Towards women's leadership: the theory

1.1. *From transitional government (1991) to drafting the 1995 Constitution*

With the establishment of the transitional government in 1991, consideration began to be given to women's political participation, including decision-making roles. Political measures have been taken to implement women's rights to ensure equality with men, such as the ratification of the Women's Policy in 1993, which aims to integrate women's rights into all aspects of social life.

Source 37. Guidelines of the national women's policy

"A national women's policy was adopted in 1993. The policy outlines the major economic, social and political concerns of Ethiopian women and indicates broad strategies of intervention."

Meaza Ashenafi, *Participation of Women in Politics and Public Decision Making in Ethiopia* (Addis Ababa: Forum for Social Studies, 2009), 42.

A Women's Affairs Office (WAO) was established under the Prime Minister's Office to appoint gender focal points in ministries and commissions. Under its auspices, a national action plan was launched, and one of the seven priorities was the need to increase women's participation in decision-making.

Although too few in number, there were two female combatants as members of the Transitional Assembly and a few more as ministers in the ministries of education, health and labour and social affairs. There were also deputy ministers in the ministries of trade, economic cooperation and health. It was the first time that women had held such senior posts. Three women were also members of the Constitutional Drafting Commission, while twelve women were elected to the Constitutional Assembly, which ratified the 1995 Constitution. A study of their actual role in the ratification process would be of great interest.

The lack of historical research on these women raises the question of the balance between their commitment to party membership and ideology, and their role in women's issues. It should be noted that the women appointed as ministers were not party members at the time of their nomination. In addition, two ministers (for health and education) have taken action on women's issues. They taught at Addis Ababa University and were part of the group responsible for establishing the Centre for Education and Training of Women in Development (CERTWID) at Addis Ababa University.

Until 2005, when the WAO was shifted to the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MOWA), the implementation of the WAO's activities was weak due to its lack of representation in ministerial (or cabinet) meetings. In 2006, the MOWA further stated that the WAO was constrained by a lack of institutional capacity (particularly at the sub-regional level) and a lack of budget to confront

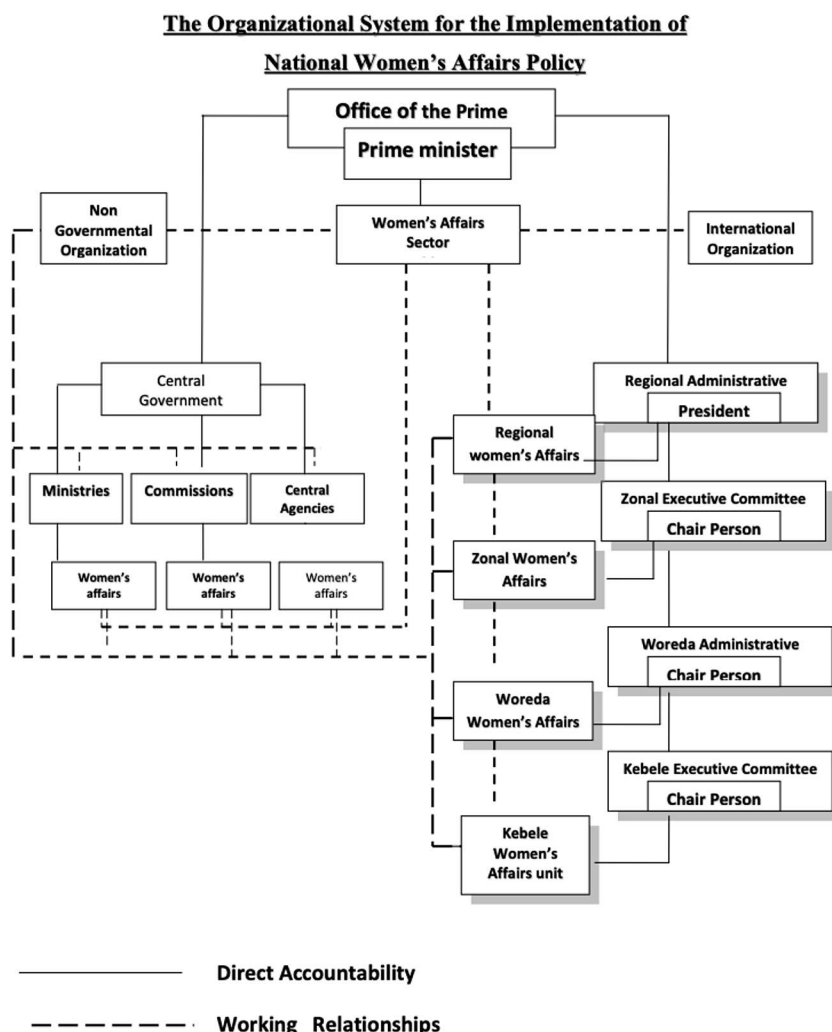


Figure 16. The transitional government of Ethiopia

coexisting customary laws and practices. In the regions, women's offices were dependent on donors or NGOs for capital and project funding.

1.2. *The 1995 Constitution adaptation*

After the drafting and ratification of the 1995 Constitution, women tried to make it gender sensitive. They challenged the Constitutional Commission because the first draft did not directly address women's demands. Women members of the EPRDF and others from Addis Ababa and the regional states attempted to play a pivotal role in improving the first draft, which had only

one article stating that “women, children and physically challenged people will have special provisions” (1995). They rejected this article demanding its improvement. In March 1995, they sent a petition signed by many women to the commission asking for a discussion on women’s rights.

The commission responded positively. A month later (in April) a forum was set up, with the participation of women from all regions, to identify the rights to be included in the constitution. As a result, women’s social, political and economic rights were enshrined in the constitution, mainly in Article 35. The constitution laid down the principles and rights that women had been fighting for since the student movements of the 1960s: equal rights for women in marriage, paid maternity leave, equal rights in employment, promotion and pay and organisation rights; rights that eventually empower women. The 1995 Constitution also recognised the historical marginalisation of women and granted them positive measures to redress it. But these constitutional provisions have rarely been put into practice.

1.3. *The question of women’s participation in parliament*

The 1995 Constitution provided a basis for amending the penal and civil codes, which contained most of the discriminatory and harmful traditional practices. Here too, women were involved in the process of amending the laws. They participated through the intermediary of women who sat in parliament, a position that enabled them to enforce gender equality in debates and legislation, as well as through members of women’s associations in the regions.

Source 38. Participation of women in the government in 2006

In 2006, “in the executive branch of the government (Ministers, Vice Ministers, etc.), women constitute 13%. Among the judges at the Federal and Regional Courts, again 13%; among judges presiding over Supreme, Higher and First Instance Courts in 1995 (EC) women were 25.5%. In the Civil service, women occupied only 24.3% of the higher positions (Ministers, Commissioners, deputies, Directors, Division Heads, Ambassadors, etc.).”

Ministry of Women’s Affairs (MOWA), *National Action Plan for Gender Equality (NAP-GE) 2006–2010* (Addis Ababa: MOWA, 2006), 11–12.

The level of women’s participation in legislative assemblies is indicative of the level of women’s political participation in a country. In this regard, in 2000, the UN declared women’s participation in parliament to be one of the criteria for measuring the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs): it should be at least 30% to ensure women’s participation in the legislative assembly. In line with the MDGs targets, the EPRDF proposed from the 2005 elections that 30–40% of its candidates for the national and regional assemblies should be

women. However, although the number of women in the legislature increased slightly in 2006, it was still below the expected 30%.

2. A change towards women's leadership: the statistics

In Ethiopia, from 1995 to 2018, five national elections took place, one almost every five years. Following Proclamation Number 71/2005, the mandate of MOWA also included children. Women leadership implementation was accompanied by efforts made regarding women's access to education included in the Education Sector Development Plans (ESDP) created and renewed every five-years. It aims to create awareness about the importance of girls' education, the need for a more gender sensitive curriculum, teaching environment (in attitudes, number of female teachers or managers, and positive discrimination).

Table 6. Samples of policies integrating women's issues (by G. Zewide)

Name	Date	Type of policy
National Policy on Ethiopian Women	1993	Gender equality policy
New Education and Training Policy (NETP) (art. 3.7.7; 3.7.9; 6.3)	1994	Education policy related to gender equality
The Ethiopian Higher Education Proclamation	2003	Education policy related to gender equality
National Action Plan for Gender Equality (2006–2010)	2006	Gender equality policy
Growth and Transformation Plan II (2011–2020)	2015	National development plan
Women's Development and Change Package (Phase II)	2017	Gender equality policy
Gender Equality Strategy for Ethiopia's Agricultural Sector	2017	Agricultural policy related to gender equality

2.1. Women's participation in politics (1995–2010): the statistics

The first national election was held in May 1995. Women's participation as members of the House of People's Representatives during this first election was only 2.75%. The National Action Plan of 2006 mentions that there were 42 (7.7%) female parliamentarians after the 2000 election. In the House of Federation, they made up 6.0%, 12.9% in the regional state councils, 7.1% in *wäräda* councils, and 13.9% in *qäbäle* councils. In the same year, out of the 161 candidates who competed for seats in the HPR only 23 (14.3%) were women, and 15 of them were independent candidates. Out of the 263 candidates running for regional council, only 35 (13.3%) were women that came from established parties, while only one was an independent candidate. In fact, female party members tended to compete for lower-level institutions and women's engagement at the executive level was still very low.

Table 7. International and regional gender equality/women's rights agreements (By M. Herman)

Key International Agreements	Ratification	Date
Convention on the Political Rights of Women (CPRW)	Yes	1969
Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)	Yes	1981
Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (OP-CEDAW)	No	No
Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)	Yes	1991
Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (DEVAW)	Yes	1993
Cairo International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD)	Yes	1994
Beijing Platform for Action (BPA)	Yes	1995
Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)	Yes	2000
Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)	Yes	2015
Regional Treaties		
African Charter on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR)	Yes	1998
Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (SDGEA)	Yes	2004
Banjul Declaration	Yes	2009
Agenda 2063	Yes	2015
Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of No Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol)	Yes: some reservations	2018

Sources: Compilation based on United Nations Human Rights. Ratification Status for Ethiopia (See also Brems [2007]; Federal Government of Ethiopia [1994]; Gennet Zewide [2018, 186–88]).

During the third election in 2005, female participation in the *wärädas* and *qäbüles* was 8,246 (22.8%) and 162,837 (20.6%), respectively. As well, the population of female parliamentarians reached 21.2% and in 2010, their representation in parliament reached 27.8% (152 women). They still remain below the benchmark set to increase female participation in parliament (30% and 40–50% at regional state level).

As reported by the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia for the fourth elections for the House of People's Representatives in 2010, while 1,916 (87.6%) were male, only 272 (12.4%) were female. At the same time for state councils, 4,021 (84.7%) males, and 725 (15.3%) females were elected. In the year 2010, women's involvement shows little progress. Accordingly, only 16.9% of the judges were females. At the federal level, the number of female lawyers was 27.58%.

2.2. Political participation (2015–2018)

Since the adoption of the 1995 Constitution, women have stood for election and slowly secured parliamentary seats where their numbers have increased

from one election to the next. Women started to become more present in the legislative, executive and the judiciary branches of government in both federal and regional governments. As a result, in the last election of 2015, women secured 38.8% of the seats in the Federal Parliament. They also have the opportunity to chair important parliamentary standing committees such as agriculture, budget, government expenditure, social affairs, natural resources, democratic institutions, planning and of course women's affairs.

The percentage of women in regional parliaments, particularly in 5 regions, was better than the Federal reaching gender parity. For example, in Təgre, 50% of the parliamentarians were women, while the percentage of women parliamentarians in Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples and Addis Ababa is 48%, and in Amhara and Oromia 47%. In the rest of the regions, the percentage of women ranged from 18% in Benishangul-Gumuz to 37.6% in Dire Dawa.

Starting from 2015, women were included in all three branches of government in leading ministries and other government agencies in the executive branch. Women's participation has reached about 25% in the judiciary.

According to Tesfaye Semela et al., women's participation slowly increased between 2010 to 2015, being more represented as parliamentarians than ministers. In October 2015, women represented less than 10% of the ministerial positions, though the 30% has not been reached yet in all sectors.

It may be attributed to a change in mentality, to some efforts by government, but also with to the rise of women's civil society organisations. Since the appointment of Dr Abiy Ahmed as Prime Minister in April 2018, the promotion of gender parity has been given a key focus. On 18 October 2018, he appointed a gender-balanced cabinet of 20 members, as the previous cabinet consisted of 28 members, of which only 4 were women. Ethiopia followed in Rwanda's footsteps towards this equal gender representation, as Rwanda received international recognition for women's representation in government with women making up to 43 percent of its cabinet and 61 percent of its parliamentarians. In Ethiopia, women now hold leadership positions in defence and security, trade, labour, culture, science and finance. For example, Aisha Mohammed Musa became the country's first female defence minister and Muferiat Kamil (former speaker of parliament) was appointed the first minister of peace. Meaza Ashenafi, the founder of the Ethiopian Women Lawyers' Association, an adviser on women's rights to UNECA (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa) and a former a judge on the Ethiopian High Court from 1989 to 1992, was appointed Chief Justice. Birtukan Mikdesa was approved to head the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE). Finally, Sahle Work Zewde became President, the third woman to hold this position on the African continent. Formerly, Ethiopia's ambassador to France, Djibouti, Senegal and IGAD, she was UN

Source 39. Eighth periodic report submitted by Ethiopia to the CEDAW in 2017

“Article 7: “Political and Public Life”

60. (...) According to the political party’s Registration Proclamation 573/2008, support to be granted to political parties is apportioned between the parties on the basis of the number of women candidates nominated by the political parties among other factors. In the national election held in 2015, the Board allocated 15 per cent of the total budget for political parties that meet the threshold of 30 per cent women representation. This is an increment from the previous national election where 10 percent of the total budget was allocated for the same purpose.

61. Another measure (...) relates to securing special media time for campaign by female candidates. This measure is the first of its kind in the country (...) Further, the Board was able to ensure dedication of 10 percent of the total print media coverage to female candidates. During the 2015 national election 40 per cent of the officials responsible for election execution were women. (...)

62. Women’s representation in the House of People’s Representatives increased to 27.9 per cent in 2010 from 21.4 per cent in 2005; the deputy speaker of the house was a woman; there were 4 women chairs of standing committees; 91 women were members of the standing committees; 4 women were in the advisory committees and 9 women were members of coordinating committees. In the current parliament (fifth term), women’s membership has reached 38.8 per cent; 7 women are chairs and 8 women serve as vice-chairs of standing committees. Similarly, women’s representation in the regional councils reached 40.2 per cent in regional councils and 50 per cent in woreda and kebele councils. However, there are disparities among the regions.

63. In the fifth general election held in 2015, a total of 1,270 candidates (301 for federal and 969 for regional councils) ran for office. This is an increase from the previous election in 2010 where only 927 female candidates ran for office at the regional and federal levels (...).

64. The number of women in the judiciary and executive branches has also shown progress. Within the judiciary, at the federal first instance courts, women account for 43.4 per cent of the judges. Similarly, at the federal high court, women account for 21.3 per cent of the judges. At the Federal Supreme Court there are seven women judges (17.5 per cent). While these numbers show that the proportion of women has increased compared to the previous reporting period, the representation of women in the judiciary remains low. Within the Federal executive branch, women’s representation stood at 15.5 per cent at higher level and 22 per cent at middle level positions.

65. Regarding women’s participation in non-governmental and grass-roots organisations concerned with public and political life, the government has laid down the necessary framework to encourage women to form associations, trade unions, professional associations and other unions. (...)

66. Although the progress towards ensuring equality in public and political life is encouraging, challenges remain. These include the low level of women’s representation in the executive and judicial branches and the low number of women in decision-making positions. (...)

Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), “Eighth Periodic Report Submitted by Ethiopia under Article 18 of the Convention, due in 2015 [Date received: 21 November 2017]” (United Nations, 18 December 2017, CEDAW/C/ETH/8).

Undersecretary General and special representative of the Secretary General to the African Union before her nomination. These are the few examples of women whose education, career and leadership have finally been recognized for their own achievements. In fact, Ethiopia has seen the largest increase in women's political representation in the executive, from 10 percent women ministers in 2017 to 47.6 percent in 2019.

2.3. *Women's civil society organisations: rise and struggles*

After the 1995 Constitution, women's associations were organised in Addis Ababa and in the regions, whether general (mass), professional or sectoral. They included women from all walks of life, from small traders and farmers, to office workers. Some of the regional women's associations in Amhara, Təgre and Oromia have between half a million to one million members. They were mobilised around issues such as political and economic empowerment, access to property and ending harmful practices. For example, *Dire Dawa* women demonstrated against the rape of a child by an old man and an acid attack on a young couple. On *Nehase 22, 1987* (E.C.) (28 August 1995), the Addis Ababa Women's Association (AAWA) mobilised a thousand women to demand the closure of pornographic newspapers that were degrading the position of women in society. One of the most prominent and publicised associations is the Ethiopian Women Lawyer's Association (EWLA), which fights discrimination against women and raises awareness of issues such as violence against women. Others include AAWA, the Network of Ethiopian Women's Associations (NEWA), which has 20 member organisations, and the Organization Against Gender-Based Violence, the Ethiopian Teacher's Women's Coalition Against HIV and AIDS or the Forum for African Women Educationalists Ethiopian Chapter, Women in Mass Media, Women Writers' Association, Women Painters' Association. These organisations work hard to promote women and their place in the society as a central social issue. Smaller associations are doing extensive work: *Setaweet*, a feminist movement association founded in 2014 to empower men and women equally; AWSAD (Association for Women's Sanctuary and Development) was founded in 2003 to help women rebuild their lives after experiencing violence; or *Siqqee* established in 1997, which brings together marginalised women to train them in practical work skills and provide information on their rights. Gemma Burgess, who has worked on women's activism, explains that: "a new law was passed, the Proclamation for the Registration and Regulation of Charities and Societies (in 2009), which classifies civil society organisations (CSOs) whose contributions from abroad make up more than 10 percent of their budget as 'international' NGOs. The law identifies areas that such NGOs cannot work on, one of them being 'gender.'" Other scholars have also questioned the implementation of this law on the capacity of women's associations to

act, but there have been no in-depth studies or exhaustive studies on how the law really affects all associations, from the largest to the smallest. Members of Ethiopian women's associations also have different views on the use of foreign funding to support Ethiopian women's position in society. Most women's associations continue to operate as "local associations" and promote a woman as a mandatory representative of Ethiopian society. In 2019, a new Civil Societies Proclamation introduced a number of changes, including a clear recognition of the right to operational freedom, the lifting of restrictions on funding considered "foreign," particularly for those working on human rights (and therefore on "gender"), and the expansion of fundraising opportunities. This change will allow an in-depth study of the implementation of actions by the women's associations over the last decade.

Conclusion

Women's equality is still work in progress, as legal and constitutional provisions have not addressed the many institutional, cultural and structural challenges faced by women. Scholars debate the question of female activism and feminism and its representatives in contemporary Ethiopia. The issue is to understand the role of women who reach high political positions and their actions, between promoting political ideas and/or the "woman question" on the front row of public debates. As more and more women reach high positions, only time will allow us to explore this question currently under discussion. Efforts still need to be made to increase women's access to education and thus their participation in political decision-making and leadership (especially at the post-graduate levels for high-ranking positions).

It has been proven that the participation of more women in political leadership can benefit the society in all its societal issues: democracy, sustainable peace, gender equality, economic development etc. However, the diversity of the women themselves needs to be represented as they are not a homogeneous group. A change of mentality is also needed in Ethiopian society in order to increase their leadership role. A popular proverb in Ethiopia is: "Even if a woman knows, the decision should be made by man / ምንም ሴት ብታቅ በወንድ ያልቅ." It is the attitude of both men and women that need to be challenged. For example, Emirie notes in 2005 that Ethiopian women are reluctant to engage in activities outside their homes, for fear of failure. Habtamu Wondimu, in 2004, noted that scholars continue to argue that many women, socialised through patriarchal values, have developed a reluctant attitude towards participation in public spheres. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the current generation (both men and women) to take women's equality to its logical conclusion through education and various strategies.

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Part 5

Part Five. Women at War

Margaux Herman

Chapter 10

Women and War

“Wake up men! Protect your country! Leave alone the men! We the women will fight!”

Ethiopian women’s slogans in 1936.

Throughout Ethiopian history, wars have been frequent and generally accepted as being men’s affair. However, women have had a role to play during wartime and have been involved at different levels. Their participation has been studied by historians from medieval times up to the end of the 20th century. Richard and Rita Pankhurst cover the topic over an extended period of time. Margaux Herman focuses on the Middle Ages up to the 16th century. Minale Adugna is interested in the campaign of Adwa (1895–1896) and the Italian occupation (1936–1941), while Tsehai Berhane Selassie has written some biographies of recognised patriots. This chapter will therefore provide an overview of women’s participation in warfare and wartime. The transcription used for the 20th century onwards’ characters is the one used both by Minale Adugna and Tsehai Berhane Selassie.

1. Can women participate in wars?

1.1. “*To be a soldier is a male quality, being a woman is being a coward*”

In Oromo groups, women do not belong to the *gadaa* grades, but they evolved through their husbands’ careers. Only men are engaged in warfare. Different myths are told to justify this social order. One story recounts the failure of women to participate in warfare in ancient times to justify their role in being restricted to only helping with the necessary preparations.

In the same manner, in the Christian kingdom in the highlands, a coward was insulted and regarded as a woman. Many examples are found in Ethiopian sources over time.

In more recent times, Gebru Tareke, dealing with the Second Wayane movement (1975–1991), indicates that the fighters in the First Wayane movement were all men and were “quite chauvinistic” saying that “it was common to dress prisoners of war, spies, and collaborators in women’s garments, and parade them on market days, the implication being that they were as weak as women.”

Source 40. The failure of women to participate in warfare in Guji-Oromo tales

“Women fighters went to war in a group of ten. They raided animals and other belongings (*waatoo*, used for perfume) from the enemy and headed back to their camp. However, the enemy followed them to retrieve the raided animals and the *waatoo*. (... the troop finally surrendered the animals but retained the *waatoo*. Back home, it is recounted that they had difficulties counting each other). Finally, they wanted to be sure about their number and sought help from a man to count them. The man asked them to sit down, counted ten of them, and reported that no member had died. It is said that because of this incompetence, women were declared unfit for fighting.”

Dejene N. Debsu, “Gender and Culture in Southern Ethiopia: An Ethnographic Analysis of Guji-Oromo Women’s Customary Rights,” *African Study Monographs* 30, no. 1 (March 2009): 15–36.

Source 41. Cowards should be considered as women

Decree issued by King Mənəlik in November 1888: “The man who handles a lance and does not come to this expedition is a woman and no more a man. He shall be called by the name of his wife, and have no share in their common wealth. She may take everything.”

Tekle Tsadiq Mekuria, *Atse Yohanisina ya-Ityopia andinat* (Addis Ababa: Kuraz Publishing Agency, 1982 E.C.), 517, quoted in Minale Adugna, *Women and Warfare in Ethiopia* (Addis Ababa: OSSREA, 2001), 3.

1.2. Findings regarding women’s active participation

In medieval and modern times, it was not uncommon for women to carry weapons. In the 17th century, women of the aristocracy were reported to be “mounted mule or horse, spears in their hands with their belts tightened and their *shāmas* or togas draped over their heads.” King Iyasu issued a decree against the practice in 1691.

Source 42. Iyasu’s proclamation on women

On the 18th of ter 1691, Iyasu settled his camp at Djäfdjäf where he had the herald proclaim that: “the girls of the country must not ride astride mules, because before these girls took the habit of riding mules with saddles, tightening the belts of their shirts, covering their heads with their shmmas, *dressing and walking like men*, and holding a long spear in their hand. They were marching on the road of the expedition, like men.”

Ignazio Guidi, *Annales Iohannis I, Iyasu I et Bakaffa* (Louvain: Peeters, 1961 [1903]), vol. 2, 157.

In the highlands, a *šaläqa*, the owner of a special type of land known as *dämbäгна*, was expected to register for *damb*, or “military” service. These lands became hereditary and subject to custom. It is generally accepted that

women could not inherit them, but exceptions can be found. Until the mid-19th century, daughters could inherit war material in the absence of a male successor. In addition, when a male *šalāqa* died (or was ill) and had a young son, women acted as his guardians and therefore had to come to the forefront, even if they did not always wield weapons in battle.

There are examples of women who had acquired *dāmbägna* and were therefore expected to fulfill the duties associated with their land. They usually used a proxy (or male intermediary), but had to raise soldiers and to follow their troops on marches. Ethiopia's first written constitution in 1931 affected women's right to inherit land, including military land. However, examples of women patriots taking on military roles after the death of their father or husband are well known.

Source 43. The prohibition of women to enlist in military expeditions (1931)

One letter of the Minister of Pen, *Tsehafe Tezaz* Wäldä Mäsqa, dated Miyazya 26, 1926 CE, which was addressed to the minister of war, for instance, did prohibit the enlistment of women in military expeditions: "... [the daughter of a deceased officer and soldier]... is no longer to enlist in the *damb* and is no longer to hold the rifle but she should be eligible to receive... the security towards the upbringing of the dead officer's or soldier's sons who are not yet of age to enlist in the *damb*, and to hold the rifle until the boys reach 15 years."

Tsehai Berhane Selassie, "Women Guerrilla Fighters," *NorthEast African Studies* 1, no. 3 (1980), 76–77, quoted in Minale Adugna, *Women and Warfare in Ethiopia* (op. cit.), 21.

Source 44. The women shall learn the use of military arms (1935)

In his speech to the parliament on the eve of the war, King Ḥaylā Śellase called for the unreserved contribution of women: "... our women must be taught to nurse the wounded and even to fight. We shall be glad if in Ethiopia, as in some other countries, the women learn the use of military arms and undergo military exercises."

W. J. Makin, *War over Ethiopia* (London: Jarolds Ltd, 1935), 102–3, quoted in Minale Adugna, *Women and Warfare in Ethiopia* (op. cit.), 21.

On the contrary, certain war decrees ordered women to take part in military expeditions, such as in 1771, when *ras* Mika'el Schul declared that female fief holders should actually lead their soldiers into battle. Similarly, in the first quarter of the 19th century, *ras* Gugsä issued a decree stating: "One who does not join the army of Gugsä, man and woman, will lose his genitals and her breasts, respectively." Wars affected women in many ways but women always responded to a mobilization order as soon as they heard it.

1.3. *The case of pregnant women*

Pregnant women were generally not allowed to join military expeditions, but some are reported to have joined military expeditions by hiding their pregnancy. In Somali communities, pregnant wives of war leaders are said to have participated in wars because they were seen as a rallying force if their husbands fell. It was also believed that a son born in battle would be very brave. Dəl Wämbära, the wife of Imam Aḥmad in the 16th century, also gave birth during warfare. Despite these exceptions, pregnant women were generally not allowed because of the difficulties of the long marches. However, pregnancy could not be completely avoided, especially during prolonged campaigns, as is reported to have been common during the Italo-Ethiopian war of 1936–41.

2. *The roles of women in war*

In times of peace, women glorified bravery and patriotism by honoring brave warriors, especially if they were related to them, as they could claim privilege in society.

Medieval historical sources indicate that women accompanied the army in its campaigns as providers of various services. According to the literature, number of camp followers was often greater than the number of combatants, sometimes even twice as many, and was mainly made up of women. These women had to keep up with the army, often walking 10 to 20 miles a day and enduring the same harsh conditions. Only the wives of high officials and royal families were allowed to ride mules.

Source 45. The composition of the army at the battle of Adwa (1896)

For the Battle of Adwa, estimations indicate that the army was composed of more than 130,000 combatants and that the camp followers might have numbered from 30,000 to 70,000 people (men and women). Given the fact that most often the majority of the camp followers in military expeditions were women, one can safely assume that on average no fewer than 20–30,000 women participated in the campaign of Adwa.

Minale Adugna, *Women and Warfare in Ethiopia* (op. cit.), 17.

2.1. *Motivating to fight*

Many sources, from medieval to more recent times, report that women encouraged men to join military expeditions before the outbreak of war. Once mobilized, they followed the army, “singing, laughing and frolicking as if they were at a party,” thus providing a moral force behind the troops. During the war against the Italians in 1936, the role of women as propagandists inspiring patriotism, even as composers of songs was recognized, such as Shäwareged Gädlä, Kābbädächch Seyyum Māngäsha (ከበደች ሥዩም መገኘሽ), Səṇəddu Gäbru

(usually written Shewareged Gedle, Kebedech Seyum and Senedu Gebru), among many others.

Source 46. Queen Taytu motivating the soldiers on battlefield

According to the king's chronicler: "*Ītege* Taytu seeing some soldiers hesitating cried to them with all her strength, 'courage, victory is ours, strike.' The soldiers could not run away when encouraged by women and returned to the fighting."

Chris Prouty, *Empress Taytu and Menelik II* (London: Ravens Educational & Development Services, 1986), 156–57.

The same traditional role is reported in Oromo societies. A custom related to the wife anointing her husband with butter when he goes to war, and blessing him, "*Waaqninagaan si galchu*," meaning "*Waaqa* bring you back home safely," while handing him the spear, testifies to this role.

2.2. *Preparing, carrying, and collecting food, supplies and weapons*

During mobilisation and the march, women performed many tasks depending on their rank. Elite women had supervisory roles. In the military camps, women prepared food and drink, so they had the arduous task of transporting food and goods including various utensils such as pots for making *tej* (hydromel), *tella* (local beer), *wot* (stew), baking pans for making bread, mills for grinding flour, jars of honey, horns for drinks, baskets, grinding stones etc.

Women had to fetch water and collect firewood. Some were in charge of preparing the campsite by digging trenches and clearing the camp and the roads. Women also had to stay awake at night as they were responsible for looking after property, ammunition, prisoners and animals. After the battles, women were responsible for collecting booty and ammunition from captives, the dead and wounded.

Source 47. Taytu and her women supplying the soldiers

Ītege Taytu mobilized the women to supply water to the fighters and the wounded: "The empress collected her 10–12,000 women in the camp and issued water jugs to all of them. This army of another type filled their jugs at the river and was ready to carry water to those who fought whenever in need. Meanwhile other women were busy redistributing rifles and bullets of the wounded and that of their dead menfolk and captives of war to the combatants."

Chris Prouty, *Empress Taytu and Menelik II* (op. cit.), 159, quoted in Minale Adugna, *Women and Warfare in Ethiopia* (op. cit.), 20.

In August 1935, Princess Tsehay, the daughter of the king, founded the Ethiopian Women's Welfare Association (EWWA) under the patronage of *Ītege* Mānān. With the help of Lady Barton, the wife of the British

Ambassador, they supervised the preparation of clothes, mattresses, gas masks, bandages and rations for the troops. They also raised money for the association and the Red Cross. Some women, like *wäyzäro** Shewareged Gedle, sold their property to buy clothes, medicine, bullets and rifles and gave financial support to the Red Cross.

2.3. *Informers and active participation*

Women also served the army by misleading the enemy and acting as correspondents between the scattered or divided army units. During the Battle of Adwa in 1896, the women of Adigrat are said to have attacked the Italians and cut off telegraph lines. In 1936, women are also remembered for sending avalanches of stones from hilltops and setting fire to the Italian camps. Women gathered information and participated in the intelligence services as they were less suspicious. They demonstrated this talent at the Battle of Adwa, during the resistance against the Italians (1936–1941) or within the Central Committee of *Wust Arbegnoch* (Inner Patriots). Reports and oral sources highlight the role of Ethiopian women who married Italians (or who were their concubines) and who shared with the patriots the military secrets revealed by their husbands. Domestic servants of the Italians, sellers who had access to military camps and residences, and women who ran drinking houses in the towns also played the same role. Conversely, they also supplied the enemy with false information.

Source 48. Examples of patriotic women's actions

Sylvia Pankhurst in the Ethiopia Observer (1957) stated that the female patriot Shewareged Gedle had organized an elite Ethiopian intelligence service to gather more arms while leading the Ethiopian guerilla fighters to the locale of Addis Alem to defeat an Italian fortification. Captured by the Italians, Pankhurst describes her strength: "She was captured by the Italians and tortured by them with electricity to compel her to disclose her accomplices; despite all their cruelties, she preserved silence."

Very active in the diplomatic campaign, Princess Tsehay made an address to the Women's Advisory Council of the League of Nations, against the use of mustard gas by Italy: "For seven days without break the enemy have been bombing the armies and peoples of my country including women and children with terrible gasses... Against this cruel gas we have no protection... This suffering and torture are beyond description..."

New Times and Ethiopian News, 22 March 1936.

2.4. *Nurses*

Women facilitated burials and are well documented for caring for the wounded from the 16th century sources relating to the conflict against 'Adal to 20th century sources. For example, against the Italians, women assisted members of the Red Cross in carrying the wounded, providing first aid or

full nursing services, using traditional medicines made from the roots, barks, fruits and leaves of various trees. Women like *wäyzäro** Kebedech Seyum are remembered for caring for the wounded, and Senedu Gebru for learning the techniques of modern nursing. The latter joined the Holäta Military Academy (ሆለታ የጦር ትምህርት ቤት) with her sister Desta Gebru and *wäyzäro** Tsege Mengesha. Wearing uniforms and hats with Red Cross insignia, they served the cadets, nursing both combatants and civilians suffering from gunshot wounds, burns and poison gas. They worked with *ras* Imru in the Wälläga, Illubabor and the Gibe regions.

2.5. Peacemakers

Another role of women during the wars was attributed to the widows as peacemakers. Acting between two camps, women were the privileged mediators for the signing of peace treaties. For example, in 1865, a mourner from Bulga nicknamed “*Annat Awaju*” (literally ‘mother of a proclamation’), tried to stop the war between Mənəlik and Bəzabeh.

Source 49. Radio appeal of *Etege Mänän* in 1935

On 13 September 1935, Etege Mänän made a radio appeal: “... There is still time for those who desire justice to take action to end the most unjust of wars... I, therefore, appeal to France the emblem of equality, fraternity and liberty; to Great Britain, defender of justice; for all races and to the whole world to abandon all further delay in saving my country. (...) “Women of the world unite. Demand with one voice that we may be spared the honor of useless bloodshed.”

New Times and Ethiopian News (May 9, 1936), quoted in Minale Adugna, *Women and Warfare in Ethiopia* (op. cit.), 23.

In Oromo societies, women have also traditionally acted as peacemakers, as seen in the conflicts that arose between the Guji and the Boräna. While the former wanted peace, they sent a *lichoo*, a female peace envoy, to the *hayyu*, the judge of the opposing group. The custom commands respect for a *lichoo* and protects her from any harm. Some cases are known of men being sent as *lichoo* in minor conflicts, but women were usually chosen for serious conflicts. The *lichoo* prepares the ground for major peace talks, determines the venue for the meeting and reports back to her respective *hayyus*. In Garri and Boräna (two pastoralist communities), women taught their children the importance of peace and advised their husbands. In Arsi and Sidaama, women intervene to prevent conflicts. When women notice that a fight is about to break out, they untie their waistbands, tie them together in long strips and hold the ends to form a line. As soon as the men see that line, they retreat to their respective regions. Women are also used to avoid conflict by being given as wives to a leader of the opposing group in order to prevent further conflict and ensure

lasting peace. This practice is widespread in both the Amhara and Təgray cultures. Historically, it has been widely used by the elite since medieval times, as it was the case of Queen Əleni in the 15th century to prevent conflict with the Hadiyya. At the community or village level, older women usually settle disputes and reconcile individuals or groups when they come into conflict.

Women have also played an important role in returning to peace after war. For example, EWWA's contribution to peaceful life continued after the conflict with the Italians and the liberation. Members of the association who had been in exile returned and re-established EWWA by uniting the two women associations (EWWA and the Ethiopian Patriots Women's Association). The association primarily dealt with the aftermath of the war by providing food and temporary shelter for orphans and homeless widows. In addition, Princess Tsehay, who had returned as a trained nurse, provided medical services in the capital through the association.

3. Famous women leading soldiers on the battlefields

Since ancient times, some prominent women have been reported to have played decisive roles in military affairs, starting or ending wars and in leading the army into battle.

3.1. *Known medieval warrior queens*

According to M. Herman in 2020, there are references to the role of women as war leaders since the Aksumite period. The first was a semi-legendary queen from the 10th century known as Gudit/Yodit. Described in many sources as a cruel woman who brought destruction and ended the Aksumite kingdom, she is remembered as a great military leader. In the late 15th century, Queen Əleni, a former Muslim who became the wife of King Zär'a Ya'əqob (1434–1468) and remained at court until her death in 1524, is remembered for her involvement in the Muslim-Christian conflicts. Initially, she pursued a policy of reconciliation with the kingdom's Muslim neighbours. However, in the early 16th century, as the conflicts intensified, she instigated a diplomatic mission to Portugal in 1512–1513, asking King Emmanuel to form a military alliance against the Muslims. Although nothing happened with the first Portuguese mission at the court in 1520, she paved the way for the later Portuguese military action that arrived in Massāwa in 1541. At that time, two other women presented below are remembered in local and external sources for their participation as military leaders as shown in the article by Herman (2020).

3.2. *Ətege Taytu and the road to Adwa (1885/1896)*

According to Minale Adugna (2001), some famous queens played a military role in the 19th century. Harold Marcus, for example, documents the story

Queen Säblä Wängel

After the death of her husband, Ləbnä Dəngəl, in 1540, she, exiled to the monastery of Däbrä Damo, welcomed and accompanied the Portuguese military mission which arrived in the summer 1541. Her role in wartime is attested both by chroniclers and Portuguese. She rallied local support, secured supplies and advised the Portuguese in leading different attacks. She accompanied them throughout the campaign and with her ladies helped in nursing the wounded. After the death of the *imam* in 1543, she acted as a diplomat to negotiate the return of her son, Minas, captured previously in 1539 by the Muslim forces.

Bati Dəl Wämbära

She was the daughter of Mähfūz, who led attacks against the Christian kingdom until 1516. Tradition claimed that she motivated her husband, the *imam* Aḥmad, to avenge the death of her father. She participated in the expeditions despite the protestation of his soldiers. She is said to have marched when pregnant and delivered two sons during the campaigns of 1531 and 1533. Next to her, other women campaigned as Hajirah or Ferdusah. After the death of her husband in 1543, she negotiated the return of her son, taken captive in 1543, with Säblä Wängel. Later, in 1552, she married the nephew of the *imam* Emir Nur Ibn Mujadid, and again motivated him to avenge the death of her husband, which he managed to achieve in 1559, killing King Gälawdewos.

of Queen Worqitu of Wällo as the queen who helped Mənəlik to gain his crown, and who granted him a safe route through her territory in 1865 after he escaped from King Tewodros' prison. *Ītege** Mänän (usually spelled Menen in secondary sources) is also remembered for her participation in battles during the 'Era of the Princes.' For example, against the Egyptian invasion, she is said to have had 20,000 soldiers under her command.

Ītege Taytu, the wife of King Mənəlik II, is the most famous queen of the century, also remembered as a decisive player in the Adwa campaign of 1896. Following the publication of the Italian version of Article XVII of the Wuchale Treaty (signed on 2 May 1889), which reduced Ethiopia to the status of an Italian colony, she rebuked the Ethiopian translator of the treaty, *grazmach* Yosef, and refused to compromise with the Italians, leading to the abrogation of the treaty in February 1893 and making war inevitable.

Source 50. Queen Taytu refused the Protectorate status for Ethiopia

Taytu declared that she preferred war to accepting protectorate status for Ethiopia and told Antoneli, the Italian auxiliary: "I am a woman and I do not love war, but rather than accepting this [Article XVII] I prefer war."

Harold G. Marcus, *The Life and Times of Menelik II: Ethiopia 1844–1913* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 126–27.

In September 1895, at the beginning of the mobilisation, she gathered her weavers and potters, sent messages to her estates and ordered them to organise provisions and supplies along the routes of the expedition. Besides her own troops, of about 5,000 infantry and 600 cavalrymen, she had at her disposal about 3,000 rifles, 600 horses and 4 guns. She was accompanied by thousands of female camp followers, whose roles have already been mentioned.

Source 51. A description of Queen Taytu by *grazmach* Yosef

In his letter to Casimir Mondon Vidailhet, grazmach Yosef, wrote: "The Ethiopian heroine empress Taytu distinguished herself through her valour... She advanced with her artillery in front of her and the riflemen to the left and right... when the men in front were attacked by cannon fire, she assembled her forces in a fortified position and ordered them to return the fire from a distance... To prevent the front line from being weakened she returned those bringing prisoners. She also saw to it that those soldiers who had stayed in the rear would get to the front."

Minale Adugna. *Women and Warfare in Ethiopia* (op. cit.), 20.

The queen camped with her husband at the reserve position. She took part in the long siege and final surrender of the fortified position of the Italians at Məqəle on 21 January 1896. She strategically advised controlling the water supply to the Italians. On 9 January 1896, 900 men from the Queen's contingent built a barricade and they stayed there for two weeks, well supplied by the queen with food and drink. The plan worked and the Italians suffering from shortage of water were forced to surrender on 21 January 1896. Both Italian and Ethiopian sources attest the various activities of the Ethiopian women at Adwa.

After the victory at Adwa, the Italians had to leave the Tigrean region, but kept their colony in Eritrea, against Taytu's wish. From there, they launched their invasion of Ethiopia on 3 October 1935.

Source 52. Queen Taytu's advice to Emperor Menelik

The historian R. Greenfield records the queen's advice to Emperor Mənəlik and his cabinet regarding the Italian encroachment. She warns: "Yield nothing. What you give away today will be a future ladder against your fortress and tomorrow the Italians will come up it into your domains. If you must lose lands lose them at least with your strong right arms."

Richard Greenfield, *Ethiopia: A New Political History* (New York: Praeger, 1965), 122, quoted in Minale Adugna, *Women and Warfare in Ethiopia* (op. cit.), 23.

3.3. *Women at war during the Italo-Ethiopian War (1935–1936) and during the resistance (1936–1941)*

Several writers and scholars have devoted themselves to the study of the Italo-Ethiopian war of 1935–36 and the Ethiopian resistance movement that followed it until 1941. While some have only made passing reference to the role of women during this period, others such as Minale Adugna and Tsehai Berhane Selassie have studied it in detail. Women in the royal family acted mainly through fundraising and international advocacy, as mentioned previously. Only a few princesses took part in the fight. Romana Warq Haile Selassie, the wife of the Governor of Bale, accompanied her husband on the southern fronts until his death in February 1937. She, then, followed *ras* Desta Damtew until she herself was captured by the people of Adami Tulu when the Italians deported her to Italy. *Wäyzäro** Lakech Demisew, a great granddaughter of King Šahlä Šöllase of Šäwa, also accompanied her husband the *däggäzmač* Mengesha Aboye to the northern front with a rifle and in men's uniform.

After the massacre of February 1937, following the failed assassination attempt on the Italian viceroy Marshal Rodolfo Graziani, in which 30,000 Ethiopians of all ages, classes and genders were killed in three days, women's involvement increased significantly. They participated in the patriotic resistance at all levels: as nurses, informers or combatants. Women include fief-holders of a military type (*dämbäгна*) who led their own contingent. An official document of the Ministry of Defence mentions about 277 women who were included in the list of the patriots who received medals from King Haylä Šöllase on 20 January 1945. The number of women active in the resistance was in fact much higher. Both written and oral sources agree that the main contribution of women was in the underground work, which was not rewarded with a medal. Women kept the households going, but also undertook production and trade to supply provisions to the fighters. Tsehai Berhane Selassie's article "Women Guerrilla Fighters" is one of the few published works that deals exclusively with the experiences of women fighters during the occupation. Her article focuses specifically on four women leaders: Lekyelesh Beyan, Shewareged Gedle, Shewanesh Abreha, and Kelemwarq Tiruneh.

3.4. *Women at war in the post 1941 period*

In the post-1941 period, Ethiopia faced a number of rural rebellions and armed struggles. However, little attention has been paid to women's participation in these movements. In his review of literary work, Belete Bizuneh (2002) pointed out that Gebru Tareke, who studied three of the peasant rebellions between 1941 and 1973, only presents women in connection with the "First Wäyanä" (ቀዳማዊ ወያኔ) stating that women were "conspicuously absent in (...)

Three short biographies of women leaders

These short biographies have been made by selecting extracts from the work of Minale Aduḡna and Tsehai Berhane Selassie.

*Wäyzäro** **Lekyelesh Beyan** fought at the battle of Maychew on 31 March 1936. Interviewed by Tsehai Berhane Selassie in 1972, she describes how to perform the duty attached to some army land which she had inherited, she took up her father's gun and carried her four-month-old daughter on her back to join the Kəmbata army under the command of *däggazmač* Meshesha Wolde. Her husband too had a piece of land to defend. After she returned to the capital, she became a guerrilla fighter, fought in Šäwa, took part in an abortive attempt to liberate the capital in the summer of 1936 and went to Jiru. In January 1941, she was taken prisoner until the liberation.

* * *

*Wäyzäro** **Shewareged Gedle**, called “the lion-hearted woman” and “the Ethiopian Joan of Arc” is said to have learned “to fight with a sword and often practised mock duels with trained and tough soldiers” according to the Ministry of Information (1958 E.C., 49). At the beginning of the conflict, she raised funds and collected first aid medication, mobilising women patriots, with whom she fought in Šäwa. She was frequently put on trial by Italian officials for her activities. Different sources agree that she rendered multiple services in underground patriotic activities. Following the attempt on the life of Grazziani, she was suspected of treason and captured. She was deported to the Italian prison on the island of Sardinia where she was tortured for two years. Having promised not to engage in subversive activities, she was allowed to return home. Conversely, she joined an underground organisation known as *Wust Arbäñoč* (ዐርበኞች, usually written *Wust Arbegnoch* “inner patriots”). In the summer of 1940, she was engaged in a plan to attack an Italian ammunition depot in Addis Aləm, that was finalised with success in November 1940. Then, she fled to Becho in Šäwa. She continued her activity until she was again captured at Kussay in the Gurage region in December 1940. She was later sent to the prison of Akaki near the capital. Sentenced to death, she was saved by the entry of the joint Anglo-Ethiopian army into the capital.

* * *

*Wäyzäro** **Kebedeč Seyoum**, the daughter of *ras* Seyoum Mengesha, was the wife of *däggazmač* Abera Kassa. She represented her husband in Səlalə. After the death of her husband, in July 1936 while trying to liberate the capital, she received his titles and arms and took lead of his army. She fought many battles in Mänz, Täḡulät, Ifat, Səlalə and Mərhabəte. Throughout the battles, she wore men's uniform. She was already pregnant when she took over the command of the army. She gave birth in the desert and then left Šäwa for Wälläḡa with her soldiers. They fought up to southern Goḡḡam, from where she went into exile in Sudan in 1939, then via Cairo to Jerusalem. She stayed there until the Liberation of Ethiopia in 1941.



Figure 17. Kebedech Seyoum,
a female patriot, c. 1935

leadership, although they sometimes served as intermediaries, messengers, and spies.”

Relatively more attention seems to have been paid by journalists and historians to the role of women in the regional separatist movements that developed from the 1960s onwards. Kuwee Kumsa, for example, notes the important role of women both as fighters in the OLF (Oromo Liberation Front) and as providers of material support, but argues that women were not involved in decision-making. For Belete Bizuneh (2002), Kuwee’s work is important because it draws attention to gender bias found not only within the OLF but also in a number of other political movements in the country. However, he also pointed out that this work also presents a biased version of the diverse experiences of Oromo women found in different parts of the country, as attention is mainly focused on a small group of educated Oromo from a particular part of the country and their relationship with the OLF leadership, leaving out a number of other “Oromo women.”

During the resistance of the Tigrean People Liberation Front (TPLF) against the *Därg* (from 1974 to 1991), women also took part in armed conflicts, such as Kahsu Martha and Aregash Adane, an early TPLF fighter and the only woman to serve on the TPLF Central Committee. Armed women fought on both sides, participating in the war directly by fighting on the battlefield and indirectly by supplying the combatants, singing heroic songs, providing intelligence services, and acting as messengers between the combatants and the political elite in the city. They also suffered imprisonment and torture, a story that starts to be uncovered since the last decade.

Conclusion

Despite the apparent patriarchal nature of the society, Ethiopian women played an important role in military affairs. Elite women could act as war leaders, in a diplomatic role and on the battlefields. Women were essential members of the war effort, providing the necessary aid and logistical support. They carried many supplies, guarded the camps at night, cared for the dead and wounded and supplied the soldiers with everything they needed. They also acted as spies, gathering information and misleading the enemy. Finally, Ethiopian women played an active role that clearly demonstrated that “war is not the monopoly of men.” Ethiopian women also helped to sustain society during the war by participating in all productive, reproductive and community activities. They were also active in peacekeeping, using songs and other oral traditions to avert conflicts that were about to break out. They have also contributed to post-conflict reconstruction, showing resilience and using their various associations. Research on the role of women in war is still in its infancy and there is much more to be discovered. What has been left out of this chapter is the history of women as victims of armed conflict, as widows, slaves and prostitutes, or as forced migrants.

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Part 6

Women at Work

Derese Ayenachew

Chapter 11

Ethiopian Women in Traditional Craftsmanship: Specific Notes on the Wise-Women of the Šäwa Kingdom (17th–19th centuries)

“African men don’t understand professional women; they’re not used to women in the arts... as long as the pottery’s done by hand, it remains a women’s craft. As soon as machinery takes over, so do the men.”

Magdalene Odundo (Kenyan Potter),
“Uncommon Clay,” *Safari: Magazine of the
Inter-Continental Hotels Group* 9, no. 1 (1992), 20.

Numerous anthropological works analyse women’s roles in various craft activities. One of the pioneers is Elisabeth-Dorothea Hecht, who has explored the long tradition of Adere women’s basket-making as being expressions of identity, wealth, talent and as a medium of exchange and daily utility. Through her studies of material culture, she highlights the position of women in historical and contemporary Harar. Concerning the lives of different craftswomen, Anne Cassiers, in the late 1960s, recorded the life history of a potter called Mercha. However, the works suffer from not being included in wider social, political, and economic contexts. Ahmed Zekaria focused on the work of Amina Ismael Sherif, a Harari basket maker, while Marco Bassi studied the art of making milk containers among Borāna women of southern Ethiopia, as being central in various social and ritual ties and ceremonies. Finally, Tsehai Berhane Selassie, through the story of Tabita Hatuti, describes the position of potters among the Walayita and how their trade and position were affected by historical events such as the revolutions of 1974 and 1991 or the spread of Protestantism.

However, in comparison to anthropological work, few historical research works have been dedicated to the study of women's involvement in handicrafts. The present chapter will therefore be a first attempt to present a historical study on the tradition of women spinning cotton in Šäwa (17th-19th centuries).

1. The beginning and the expansion of handicraftsmanship in Šäwa

1.1. *Archaeological evidence since the 8th century*

The archaeological material cultures reveal advanced acquaintance with handicraft skills before the advent of Christianity in Mänz-Šäwa. The excavation of the Tumulus (a mass grave) in Mänz revealed refined pottery works and jewellery made of different minerals including stones that can be dated between 8th and 10th century CE. The clothes found in the Tumulus show the cotton-making skill in this period in Šäwa. In fact, it is impossible to identify the division of labour from the uncovered material cultures of the Tumulus of Mänz.



Figure 18. Derese Ayenachew, Decorated pottery from a Tumulus in Mänz.

1.2. *Šäwan traditions on spinning and pottery-making skills*

Nevertheless, the Šäwan legends and written historical sources mostly attribute the spinning and pottery-making skills to women. Spinning is taken as a divine gift to women because the Virgin Mary herself is portrayed in Ethiopian paintings as being the most skillful woman at spinning. An Ethiopian folk song that was probably inspired by the Bible admires the spinning skills of a woman, where she is called “the virtuous woman.” This able woman gathers wool and flax to make clothes with her hands for her family. The folk song is chanted annually by boys of the village in the month of August, in the middle of the rainy season at the end of Ethiopian year. They remark that women are to be praised for “spinning the cotton into thread as fine as the spider’s web” and in return she rewards them with her famous round (elliptical) bread. The analogy between the thread and the spider web is to mention the finest skill that a woman is able to do. As we will see below, the finest spun cotton was made for kings and the nobility in the Šäwa kingdom in the early 19th century.

1.3. From Gondär to Šäwa (17th–18th centuries)

Numerous handicraftsmanship establishments developed during the rise of the kingdom of Šäwa at the end of the 17th century. The chronicles of the kingdom of Šäwa and of King Mənilək II relate similar anecdotes about the transformation of agricultural tools and the territorial expansion that had been facilitated due to the craftsmen who had been brought from Gondär at the beginning of the 18th century. The first migrant group comprised war captives, soldiers who had been sent from the king of Gondär to Šäwa on a punitive military expedition because the Šäwa ruler, *mar'ed azmač* Abyye (1733–1745) refused to pay the annual tributes. The chronicles of Šäwa and Mənilək II narrate that the soldiers were arrested and they were well treated by *mar'ed azmač* Abyye. Learning of the good treatment of the captured soldiers by *mar'ed azmač* Abyye, the craftsmen from Gondär would have migrated to Šäwa, where they were openly received. There, they would have been granted land for their permanent establishment. This story marked the beginning of the expansion of handicraftsmanship in the kingdom of Šäwa.

Source 53. The migration of the craftsmen from Gondär to Šäwa

“Rather than those who lived in Gondär and Amhara, those who were captives in Šäwa had got high prestige. Hearing this prestige many people [from Gondär and Amhara] came to Šäwa [and] the king received them with great pleasure and settled them in giving rim lands. (...) many skilled handcraft men [called] Fälaša (wise men) came [to the court of king Abbeyye] (...) and they made him ploughshares, Wägäl (iron rings) sickles and axes that helped him in maximizing agricultural productivity.”

Blaten Geta Heruy Wäldä Selase, የኢትዮጵያ ታሪክ ከግንቦት ማባ እስከ ታላቁ የአድዋ ድል (Addis Ababa: ሴንተራል ማተሚያ ቤት, 1999 E.C.), 52.

2. Handicraft centres and King Šahlä Šəllase (1813–1840)

2.1. *The handicraft women at the court of King Šahlä Šəllase (1813–1840).*

The handicraft women had a particular privilege in the kingdom of Šäwa and enjoyed liberty notably during the reign of King Šahlä Šəllase (1813–1840). European travellers describe different activities of handicraftsmanship. Accordingly, there were two important centres of handicraft women during of the reign King Šahlä Šəllase. These were royal handicraft centers in the towns of Ankobär and Däbrä Berhan and at Mäntəq *Fälaša* community monastery. The travellers describe not only the type of the workshop products and the locations of handicraft centres but also, more interestingly, some of them mention precisely in their account the gender division of labour at the court of Šahlä Šəllase. Primarily, the handicraft women seemed to be qualified in spinning and pottery-making. They were called “wise women.” Johnston, a

British traveller in 1840 in the kingdom of Šäwa, remarked that the spinning was an art practised by the women in Ankobär and describes his observation; some spinners were working at the town of Alyu Amba.

He describes the action of spinning as the result of the interaction of the body and mind of a woman. Besides, he relates that the quality of the thread production depended on the speed of the spinning in time and space. The fast spinners would produce the finest thread and the slow spinners produced the second-degree thread. Accordingly, the quality of the cloth was determined by the quality of the thread.

Source 54. Observations of Charles Johnston on the cotton spinners (1844)

“I lay watching the cotton-spinners some time, thinking upon the effect produced in the human form by occupation, as I noticed that the arms of the whole party were the most beautifully moulded I had ever seen. I could attribute this general characteristic in Abyssinian women, to no other cause than the action and exercise dependent upon spinning, which requires both arms to be in constant motion, without any heavy labour being imposed at the time. The white fleecy cotton, reposing like a wreath of snow upon the bronze red skin of the hand and wrist, gradually carried to its farthest extent one way, whilst drawing from it the long slender thread, the other hand conducts, in an opposite direction, the short thin reed tipped with a piece of ivory or horn that forms the reel, which spinning as it hangs, its effect upon the thread depends upon the slowness or the quickness with which the cotton is drawn out. Continued gentle exercise in some light occupation, would lead to somewhat similar effects in forming a beautiful arm, and I recommend it to my countrywomen, whom I certainly thought of when I made the observation in Aliyu Amba.”

Charles Johnston, *Travels in Southern Abyssinia, through the Country of Adal to the Kingdom of Shoa* (London: J. Madden, 1844), vol. 2, 314–15.

2.2. *The division of the workshop: “the royal and the ordinary spinning women”*

The account of the Protestant missionaries Isenberg and Krapf, who were at the court of King Šahlä Šəllase between 1839 and 1841, describes the unique place of handicraft women in the capital city of the kingdom, Ankobär. According to them, there was a particular workshop in a royal spinning “factory” that was staffed only by women. There were six hundred women organised into a workshop that was headed by a woman.

This workshop had two subdivisions of cotton-spinning according to the types of products. These were thin and thick thread spinners. As Johnston explains, two hundred women were recruited for their fast-spinning ability and four hundred were probably slow spinners. In his account, Krapf describes the two hundred fast spinners who fabricated the best quality of thread for the consumption of the king and the nobility. The second type, which Krapf calls the “ordinary,” is probably the four hundred slow spinners, mentioned by

Source 55. The royal spinning women (1843)

“To-day, I was again overrun with patients. Debtera Guebra Selassieh brought his wife as a patient. These women are at the head of the first class of the royal spinning women, who are two hundred in number, and have to spin the finer cotton for the royal cloth, in which the king dresses himself and presents to his friends, ladies, governors. A second class of spinning women are four hundred in number: these spin ordinary cotton for soldiers and others. All are in the service of the king and seem to be free. (...) at each of the king’s residences at Ankober, Angolala, Debre Berhan and Kundi.”

Johann Ludwig Krapf, *The Journals of C. W. Isenberg and J. L. Krapf detailing their proceedings in the kingdom of Shoa and parts of Abyssinia in the years 1839, 1840, 1841, and 1842...* (London: Cass, 1843), 120.

Johnston, producing ordinary thread for the soldiers and other officials of the court of King Šahlä Šállase.

Source 56. Monasteries, agriculture and handicraft production in Sawa

“Agriculture and handicraft production were the main economic activities of the monastery. The monks and nuns were the main handicraft producers. They engaged in the production of pottery, blacksmithing, weaving and tanning. Inside the monastery, gender division of labour was practical. For instance, pottery and spinning were the duties of women and weaving and blacksmithing were the responsibilities of men. They produced objects like spears, swords, hoes, ploughshares, and earthenware utensils. The monastery craftsmen were responsible for selling their products on the market days of Aleyu Amba and Ankober. Agriculture and handicraft production were the main economic activities of the monastery.”

Chalachew Yegneh, “A History of Handicraft in Shewa (16th-19th c.)” (MA diss., Debre Berhan University, 2013), 49.

2.3. *The status of the spinning women*

Krapf underlines that these women were free compared to the other slave women workers at the court of the king. These women used to work for ten months and then, in July and August, they returned home in the rainy season. Besides, these women had the right to own property that was paid as a salary by the king. The oral tradition in Ankobär locates the spinning workshop south of the church of Ankobär Giyorgis in an area called *Fätay Amba* (Spinning hill).

2.4. *The mechanisation of cloth making*

It is worth mentioning here that the spinning materials also observed by European travellers in the early 19th century would give us an idea about



Figure 19. Spinning in a modern painting

the mechanisation of cloth making in Ethiopia. This hand mechanical thread helped women to work easily and produce more within a short time.



Figure 20. King Sahle
Selassie wearing a homemade
gabi

2.5. The legacy and the link between Gondär and Anköbär

After his trip from Gondär in 1957, W. Leslaw remarked that women were engaged in pottery and men in weaving. However, he did not say who performed the task of spinning among the *Fälaša*: “ሴቶች ደግሞ (...) የሽክላ ዕቃና የአህል ማስቀመጫ ይሠራሉ። (...) ገንቦች ማድጋች ጋንጉድስት፣ ወጭት፣ ጉሽጉሻ፣ ሞድግ የመሳሰለውን ሁሉ ነው።” (“The tasks of women are (...) pottery making, and seed storage. (...) pot, *gušguša*, *moged* and the like”). Likewise pottery-making continues to be among the duties of the women in Mäntəq Gədam, near Ankobär the descendants of the *Fälaša* of Gondär.

Conclusion

Generally, the Šāwan kings established their towns near handicraft centers. The Qəya Gabri’el handicraft centre is located near Aganča village, a foundational place of the Šāwan dynasty at the end of 17th century. King Šāhlä Šəllase relied on the Mäntəq monastery and Angoläla, a handicraft centre and the governor of Morət Šədu had his own Fälaša descendants’ handicraft centre near his residence. Both the chronicles of Šāwa and Mənilək II concluded that the advancement of the Šāwan economy lay on the shoulders of the handicraftsmanship communities. Thus, the wise women of Šāwa are remembered for their exceptional production of the finest clothing materials and royal household pottery tools for the palace in particular, and for all Šāwan people in general.

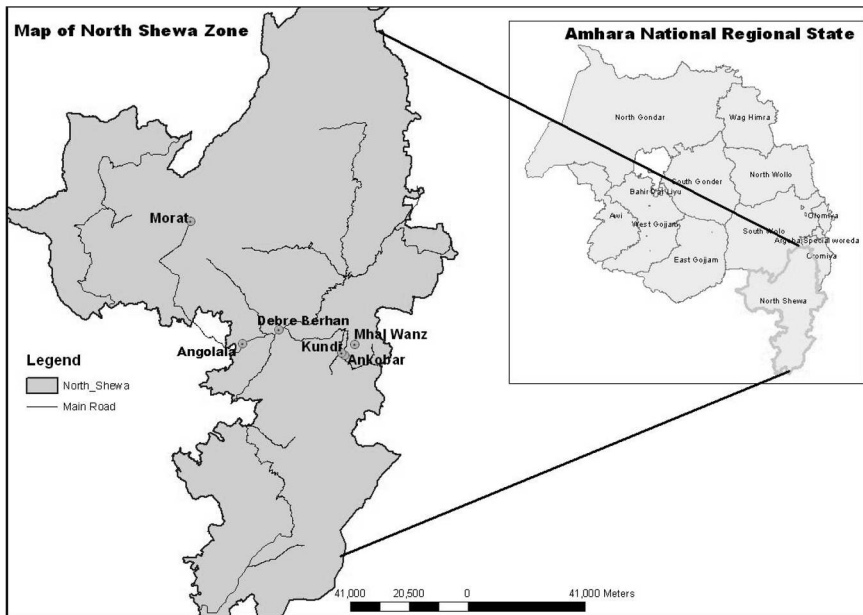


Figure 21. Handicraft Centers during the 19th century in Šāwa

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Chapter 12

Working Class Women

“[Ethiopian women’s] work never counted as work. Due to the low valuation and deliberate negligence of their labour, women were forced to believe that what they were doing would not count as work.”

Yeshe Habtemariam (1994, 59).

Working class is a tricky concept. This is because it entails an *objective* component—a class as a group of people defined by the *labour relations* they are engaged in—as well as a *subjective* component—a class as a group of people aware of their mutual interests, bound by solidarity, and capable of acting in a coherent manner. For reasons of simplicity, and not to suggest the exclusion of any other category of workers, this chapter will focus on women engaged in a specific form of labour relations: wage-workers.

Women have constituted a core component of the Ethiopian waged labour force since its emergence, contributing a majority of the workers engaged in some of the largest and most important sectors of the economy. Women have been consistently discriminated against, within the generally oppressive and exploitative conditions prevalent in the wage labour market, and even within some of the institutions of the workers’ movement, but they have nevertheless energetically struggled for their rights as working women.

1. Wage-working women

1.1. *Taking up and giving up wage employment*

Throughout the past centuries, Ethiopian women have provided a large share of wage workers. In many cases, women have taken up wage labour because of economic compulsion. In other cases, pull factors such as the extra income generated have been the reason for women turning to wage labour. Although Ethiopian women’s labour has been devalued in general, the mere appearance of a concrete, payable wage made the direct value—often hidden within the household unit and agrarian relations—of female labour evident, and has thus provided a potential source of empowerment.

However, Ethiopian women have often been expected to give up wage work when starting a family. For this reason, until the late 1970s at least, it was

assumed that the majority of waged working women were either unmarried, separated or widowed. Although the situation was already evolving at that time, up to this day, a sizeable number of women still withdraw from the job market upon marrying or having children.

More recently, labour migratory flows have resulted in a situation where many young women take up temporary employment while waiting for better-paid opportunities abroad. Because of low wages, other exit strategies from wage labour have also become increasingly attractive, including the prospect of engaging in self-employment and micro-entrepreneurial activities.

1.2. Main areas of wage work

A major sector in which female wage labour was deployed early on is domestic work. From the first decades of the 20th century onwards, female servants in urban and semi-urban areas—many of them having migrated from surrounding rural areas—have often been employed and paid by the month. Since then, the number of waged domestic workers has multiplied with the increase in the urban population. In rural areas, it has been rarer for domestic work to be compensated with wages.

Women's work has, by no means, been confined to the household. In hotel and restaurant businesses for instance, female workers have consistently predominated, outnumbering males by a ratio of between three and four since the 1970s. Other forms of food production, including bakery businesses, have also provided an outlet for female labour.

The development of a bureaucracy and of office work has opened up new opportunities for working women. They have become predominant in many categories of support staff. Over the decades, and with the expansion of education opportunities for women, they have taken over more and more professionally and technically demanding tasks originally reserved for men, and also joined the teaching profession in large numbers.

Caregiving is another sector in which female labour has been important. In hospitals, nurses have tended to be women, while the better-paid and more prestigious occupations, like that of medical doctor, have remained, initially at least, in the realm of men.

Many women have also been employed within the trade and transport sectors. Women worked as porters within large trading parties operating the long-distance trade routes of salt and other goods in the early 20th century. Such trade was eventually undermined by the coming of motor transport. But many women subsequently went to work in the offices and outlets of trading and transportation companies, though only rarely operating the vehicles. Although railway work was almost exclusively a male domain, air hostesses have exclusively been women.

Another sector in which female workers have historically constituted and continue to constitute a majority is the important textile manufacturing sector. Together with food and beverages, since the early 1960s this sector has been one of the largest manufacturing sectors in Ethiopia, both in terms of output and employment.

Women workers have also been employed on commercial farms and plantations, although male labour has generally dominated in this sector. However, in the horticultural subsector of commercial farming—buoyant since the early 2000s—around three-quarters of the workers are women.

Women have thus provided the bedrock of what is arguably Ethiopia's two most important waged commodity-producing sectors—textiles and horticulture—in addition to staffing a large part of the service sector.

In none of these sectors, however, has the contribution of female labour been matched by representation in management, which has largely been a male affair. Although the situation may slowly be changing in this regard, male management remains the general rule, even in sectors where male workers are few.

2. Rights, conditions and pay

Female wage workers have endured poor working conditions and low pay, which have been aggravated by gender discrimination. In this sense, it would not be an exaggeration to suggest—as Ethiopian radicals have in the past—that Ethiopian female wage workers have suffered from the double burden of class and gender oppression and exploitation.

2.1. Pay

In terms of pay, women have consistently been discriminated against. This is true whether one speaks of service, office, factory, or plantation work. One aspect of this is that women have occupied better-paid technical and managerial positions less frequently than men. But they have also been consistently paid less when performing comparable work. The result has been a persistent gender pay gap, which has varied only in degree over different historical periods.

Until the 1960s, the gender pay gap within an institution was sometimes as wide as by a factor of three or four. But in later imperial times, several tendencies contributed to narrowing the gap. These included the expansion of education opportunities open to women, and the concomitant increase in the recruitment of women to qualified positions. During the first republican period, wage-levelling measures decreased to a significant degree, gender discrimination in terms of pay.

Since there is no national data on the gender wage gap, the historical fluctuations are illustrated with an example from the Bahir Dar Textile Factory. The

following chart shows the mean wage differential in a randomised sample of 800 workers from the factory. Whether the trends displayed hold true for other workplaces and sectors, and whether the indication of a recent re-emergence of a widening gap constitutes a general trend, is something that future research may look into.

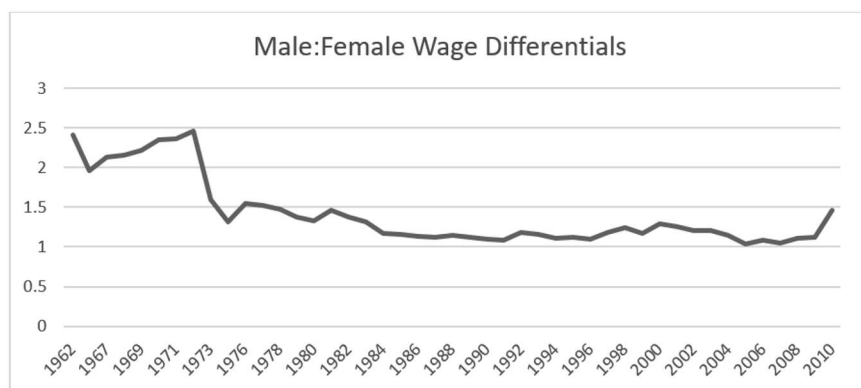


Figure 22. Gender Wage Differential at the Bahr Dar Textile Factory

2.2. Rights and conditions

Until the 1963 Labour Law was passed, women workers enjoyed no codified labour rights. Even since then, the legal regime has displayed a consistent gender bias. At the most fundamental level, this has meant that none of the consecutive general labour laws has covered employment in the sector where the share of female employees is the highest: domestic work.

But even women working in sectors that have been covered by labour legislation have found the laws and their enforcement insufficient. Poor employment security has been an issue that has persistently afflicted Ethiopian wage workers in general, and childbearing has frequently triggered women's dismissal, despite legal stipulations. Even a high-end institution such as the national airline has been known to craft contracts in such a way that pregnancy may constitute a reason for termination of employment. For the workers employed in textile factories in the 1960s, or in small-scale bakeries where unionisation was not likely to be tolerated, the managerial prerogative in deciding such issues ruled even more supreme. Partly as a result of these factors, it has been claimed that women workers have been disproportionately affected by retrenchments. For example, those that followed deregulation and privatisation in the early 1990s.

Workers being forced to engage in dangerous activities, lacking even the most basic protection and sanitation, and where there has been failure to

enforce even minimum standards are other problems that have been rife in the Ethiopian waged labour market in general, and which have affected childbearing women preponderantly.

Source 57. Debates on maternity leave in 1975

“It is sufficient to mention the case of the two working women of Lazaridis Co. who died after giving birth because of lack of sufficient maternity leave.”

Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Unions, “Letter to the PMAC” (Addis Ababa: CELU, June 5, 1975).

But women workers have also been subjected to outright extrajudicial measures. In relatively new sectors too, old ills have reappeared. It has, for example, been documented, that female workers in the horticultural sector have been subjected to physical assault and sexual harassment.

3. Women in the labour movement

Women have consistently been excluded from proportional representation in the higher reaches of the Ethiopian labour movement. Indeed, the election of women to the top position in the basic unions and federations has been rare even in the sectors dominated by women workers. This has, however, not prevented women from playing an enthusiastic role within the labour movement, and the idea that Ethiopian working women have tended to display relatively less class solidarity and militancy in confrontations with the management and the state has repeatedly been refuted in practice.

Source 58. The low participation of women in workers’ organization (1985)

“The high proportion of unskilled women workers had some effect on textile workers’ solidarity, as the female workforce had a high turn-over rate due to marriages and pregnancies. Furthermore, because of the frequent subordination of women in Ethiopian social structures, female workers usually deferred to male managers and co-workers, and they rarely played an active role in workers’ organizations.”

Killion, Thomas, “Workers, Capital and the State in the Ethiopian Region” (PhD diss., Stanford University, 1985), 442.

Since the emergence of the trade union movement in the 1960s, women have constituted a large part of its membership and have actively participated in numerous strikes that have pushed the position of Ethiopian workers forward. Important strikes in the female-dominated textile industry alone have included the IndoEthiopian textile factory strike of 1961, the Dire Dawa cotton factory strikes of 1964 and 1968, the Debre Berhan wool factory strike of 1966, the Bahir Dar textile factory strikes of 1967, the Diabaco textile

factory strikes of 1972 and 1973, the Barattolo textile strike of 1983, the National Textile Corporation strike of 1989, the Akaki textile factory strike of 1992, and numerous smaller wildcat strikes in the sector. In other words, predominantly women textile workers have constituted arguably the most consistently combative section of the Ethiopian working class altogether. In the horticultural sector, moreover, a number of wildcat strikes over the last decade has testified to the lingering militancy of Ethiopian female wage workers.

Source 59. Women and labour disputes in the 1970s

“It was thought until a couple of years ago, that women are traditionally less prone to labour disputes and are therefore less of a threat in factories which depend on large numbers of unskilled workers. A strike among the textile workers in 1971 showed, however, that this assumption was wrong.”

Lars Bondestam, “Notes on Multinational Corporations in Ethiopia,” *African Review* 5, no. 4 (1975): 545.

Although women have consistently been severely underrepresented in the formal trade union leaderships, there have been prominent activists. Daro Negash, whose grisly murder at the hands of regime militia in 1977 constitutes an infamous crime, is one of them. She was a trade union leader at the Berhanena Selam Printing Press, with experience of leading strikes at the plant as a senior member in the militant labour opposition of the time. A detailed account of her case is found in an article published in 2019 by Jacob Wiebel and Samuel A. Admasie.

Conclusion

- Female participation in the Ethiopian waged labour force has consistently been crucial across many key waged sectors.
- As female work has been devalued in general, so has female waged work. A gender wage gap has been a consistent feature of the waged labour market, although it has been narrowed over time. Moreover, women have been subjected to extrajudicial discrimination, in addition to suffering from poor conditions prevalent within the waged sector in general.
- Despite having largely been excluded from its top representative layers, women workers have persistently constituted a core part of the Ethiopian labour movement, repeatedly engaging in militant practices and struggling for the betterment of their condition.

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Chapter 13

Women and Entrepreneurship

“Historically women have been left off the small business research agenda or made invisible by research practices or in other ways written out of the analysis of self-employment.”

Carter (1993).

The literature on entrepreneurship has been plentiful in the Global North since the 18th century, including the works of economic scholars, such as Cantillon, Say or Schumpeter, in the 20th century. If over the last centuries, entrepreneurship has seemed to be the prerogative of men, just like scholarship on entrepreneurship, female entrepreneurs have always existed even if they have remained invisible throughout the course of history. Faced with the entrepreneurial model of a free and conquering man, based on hegemonic masculinity (a concept drawn up by Connell), in recent decades, female entrepreneurs have been able to either conform to it or attempt another way of being an entrepreneur, depending on different types of career. However, in Ethiopia, as in the Global South in general, entrepreneurship, including female versions, is always related to economic development and public policy issues. Therefore, most scientific articles focus either on small-scale companies (the most numerous) or on the empowerment of women through entrepreneurship. Consequently, as there is almost no historical study either of men's or women's entrepreneurship, this chapter will be mostly dedicated to the studies of and approaches to women and entrepreneurship achieved during the last two decades.

1. Potential sources allowing the history of women's entrepreneurship to be traced

There are no historical studies conducted on Ethiopian women entrepreneurs. However, some data can be collected from different available sources.

Source 60. Entrepreneur, entrepreneurship

Definitions: Being an entrepreneur was described by Schumpeter as being a pioneer. In economic science, entrepreneurship is first of all a status, that is to say being self-employed. In sociology (and according to the French *Dictionnaire sociologique de l'entrepreneuriat*), being an entrepreneur is a professional process and includes all people leading an economic activity as a business creator, an executive of a big industrial firm, or a self-employed worker.

1.1. *Archives and censuses can provide quantitative data on self-employed women*

National, regional, local and private archives can be surveyed to collect records of business licences so that a history of this field can be constructed by quantifying the documentation. Census data gives a background to the history of women as self-employed workers and entrepreneurs. The Central Statistical Office (CSO) was established in 1960, and its surveys have not yet been used in our field of inquiries. The first census was published on May 9th 1984, and though it did not offer complete coverage (only 85% of the population, the rest being estimated), it still shows that women participated in business in both rural and urban areas, especially in sales businesses and the retailing of food and beverages. In fact, the nationalisation of companies by the *Därg*, allowing private sectors only to participate in small-scale industries and handicraft activities, contributed to this trend. In 1984, more than 57.6% of the active population was self-employed and only 1% consisted of employers. In urban areas, people working in sales constituted the second major group consisting of 23.5% of the economically active population. Among the urban female workers, 43.6% were self-employed. It also has to be noticed that in rural areas, sales activities were the only type of professional activity that occupied more women than men (0.3% of male and 2.4% of female workers), while in urban areas, about 30% of women were working in the sales sector (vs 11.4% of men). This type of data therefore needs to be analysed in detail, to be put it into context and crosschecked with other available sources.

1.2. *Qualitative data sources available*

Many sources of qualitative data are available though not yet used. A study of the history of the women who participated in the Women Welfare Work Association, or who have been trained by the Women's Institute for Vocational Training can provide some clues for our study. In the same manner, conducting an exhaustive survey of women's associations related to work and business, or of female cooperatives could also be fruitful as an approach. Finally, an attentive rereading of newspapers should also be carried

INDUSTRIAL GROUP	Rural		Urban		Total	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
EXPORT AND IMPORT TRADE						
Export of beverages, tobacco, coffee, khat and tea leaves	52	74	1,530	1,767	1,582	1,841
Import of beverages, tobacco, coffee, khat and tea leaves	4	5	143	194	147	199
Export of zoo animals	24	57	13	28	37	85
Export of animal and vegetable oil, fats and wax	15	41	102	84	117	125
WHOLESALE AND RETAIL TRADE WITHIN THE COUNTRY						
Retail of medical instruments, medicine and cosmetic articles	72	407	627	380	699	787
Retail of miscellaneous articles	1,917	6,631	9,452	5,377	11,369	12,008
Retail trade of tej, tella and katikala	4,091	94,886	7,347	115,859	11,438	210,745
Wholesale trade of tej, talla and katikala (buying for sale)	27	778	82	1,826	109	2,604
Restaurants, hotels and bars	2,110	3,168	24,456	31,926	26,566	35,094

Source: Transitional Government of Ethiopia, Office of the Population and Housing Census Commission (1991).

out, as the *Ethiopia Observer*, *Addis Zämän* or more recently *Addis Fortune* or *Capital* have brought to light some information that had been left out.

Following the oral history approach, conducting interviews with former and current women entrepreneurs can also shed light on the history of the field. They can reveal not only facts and data but also the life experience of women entrepreneurs. These sorts of sources are particularly relevant for analysing the perceptions of discrimination, the difficulties of juggling a business with a household and family responsibilities as shown by Singh and Bewal in 2008 or by Gudeta and Van Engen in 2018. All these factors depend on the historical context, as well as the social position. Biographical interviews could also be tools for observing changes over a lifetime and identifying the effects of political events on professional choices (migrations, professional changes...). By comparing different life stories, there are chances to highlight generational effects, as has been demonstrated by Perrin-Joly and Kushtanina in 2018.

All these sources can help to trace the history of women's entrepreneurship. However, recent research gives us some insights into the current issues under scrutiny in women's entrepreneurship studies.

2. Female entrepreneurship: poverty reduction or empowerment?

According to René Lefort (2015), the political focus on entrepreneurship in Ethiopia is quite recent and it has accompanied the growing interest of the ruling party in this population since the 2010s.

Source 61. Micro and Small Enterprises

The *World Bank* definition of Micro and Small Enterprises (MSEs) classified MSEs as a heterogeneous group. They include a wide variety of businesses—hairdressing, handicraft makers, food processing, small shops, garment making, construction, embroidery, restaurants and a variety of trades and services that possess a wide range of skills and operate in very different markets and social environments. Their owners may or may not be poor. Some types of this business are dynamic, innovative, and growth-oriented; others are traditional ‘lifestyle’ or survivalist enterprises that are content to remain small.

Hallberg, Kristin, “A Market-Oriented Strategy for Small and Medium-Scale Enterprises” (Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, 1999), 1.

2.1. *Female entrepreneurship in Ethiopia: History and state of the art*

The gender gap in labour participation in Ethiopia is quite low, compared to other developing countries. This is a historic inheritance. According to Richard Pankhurst (1968), Ethiopian women “played a major role in agriculture, handicraft, and trade” in the Middle Ages but also have done so until contemporary times. This low gender gap can also be attributed to the country’s poverty (female work is necessary for the family’s survival) and to the past communist regime, which promoted equal work for men and women.

Female entrepreneurs can even have a dual activity, frequently named in the urban areas as “side-business,” which is very hard to measure, as it is an informal (according to an ECSA survey of 2004, 65% of the informal activities in 48 Ethiopian towns are run by women) and irregular activity. In the rural areas, self-employment in non-farming enterprises is a way to supplement farm earnings. Most of the time, the businesses run by women are small. Some studies also show that these female businesses are less successful in terms of performance and in terms of longevity. Women encounter indeed specific difficulties in setting up and maintaining a business.

Source 62. Women and micro enterprises from 1996 to 2001

A longitudinal study of 500 companies in 5 main towns of Ethiopia between 1996 and 2001 shows that the majority of these businesses are micro enterprises run by women less educated than male entrepreneurs: 75.4%, contrast with 32.6% of male run companies.

Survey made by Eshete Bekele and Zeleke Worku, “Women Entrepreneurship in Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises: The Case of Ethiopia,” *Journal of International Women’s Studies* 10, no. 2 (November 2008): 3–9.

2.2. Female entrepreneurship in Ethiopia: Resources and Constraints

According to the report by CEDAW (Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women) in 2009, several barriers prevent women from accessing loans: women's lack of information on the availability of credit, women's lack of economic stability (a criterion required to access a loan) and a general lack of trust of women in society.

These difficulties are a symptom of a lack of social support in general and from the government in particular, as well as a lack of suitable public policies. Women fail in their businesses more quickly than men, and they suffer from lack of managerial and technical skills. Scholars confirmed that women still have difficulties in accessing finance from the traditional banking system, such as commercial banks, and they would rather use local networks, by borrowing money from their neighbours and relatives or self-help associations such as *Iqqub*.

Source 63. The lack of business-related training for women (2008)

According to Bekele and Worku, in 2008, 86.8% of their sample of women entrepreneurs "were not provided with any kind of business-related training opportunities by the Ministry of Trade and Industry" whereas the educational level of the majority was below secondary level.

Eshete Bekele and Zeleke Worku, "Women Entrepreneurship in Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises: The Case of Ethiopia" (art. cit.).

In this context, actions by the Ministry of Women's Affairs, as well as international organisations, promote microcredits. In 2011, women constituted 64.44% of microfinance borrowers from different institutions (Microfinance Information Exchange). More recently, since 2017, the programme "Accelerating Progress towards the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women," led by UN Women, WFP, FAO and IFAD and supported by the governments of Sweden, Norway and Spain, has given rural women access to small loans and has also provided training courses in basic business skills and financial management.

2.3. Microcredit: a wrong solution for developing female entrepreneurship?

The field of microfinance in Ethiopia has grown rapidly over the last decade and a half. Today, nearly two million poor people have access to microcredit in Ethiopia. The participation of women in these services, however, has been a gradual process. While microfinance institutions have shown interest by providing loans to women, in Ethiopia women constitute only 45% of those concerned by microloans.

Studying microfinance by interviewing workers within 20 branches of activity in early 2010, Belwal, Tamiru and Singh show that most of the loans

were attributed to women. However, microloans are first of all quite limited in terms of limits (generally a maximum of 5,000 ETB) and repayment period (around 1 year).

Source 64. Testimony of an Ethiopian woman entrepreneur

“Entrepreneurship is a forced choice—arising out of emergent family responsibilities rather than ambition.”

An Ethiopian women entrepreneur interviewed by Rakesh Belwal, Misrak Tamiru and Gurmeet Singh, in “Microfinance and Sustained Economic Improvement: Women Small-scale Entrepreneurs in Ethiopia,” *Journal of International Development* 24, S1 (2012): 95.

In conclusion, generally speaking, microloans do not seem to be a solution for improving social mobility of the poor, either men or women, but they help to reinforce the responsibility of individuals, according to neoliberal ideology.

Despite these loans (and sometimes because of them), entrepreneurship does not appear as a way to improve the personal situation of these women. Indeed, they have very low incomes (the survey based on 2 *wereda* in Addis Ababa, shows that 60% of these female entrepreneurs earn 200 ETB or less monthly. In the same period, average earnings in Ethiopia was 1,000 ETB). It does not allow them to save enough money for investment. Moreover, the bulk of female entrepreneurs do not have the opportunity to improve their level of education. The authors also concluded that microloans do not succeed in empowering the poorest.

3. Stepping out of the traditional role to run a business

Beyond microloans, some new programs tend to facilitate the financing of women’s projects. For example, the Women’s Entrepreneurship Development Project, supported by the World Bank, disbursed 768 million ETB (about 38 million USD, from January 2014 to September 2015) to 3,227 entrepreneurs, resulting in an average individual loan of 219,605 ETB (nearly 11,000 USD). But will these programs be sufficient to change the place of the women in the rigid division of labour?

3.1. *Naturalised skills: Female entrepreneurship and household activities*

As Pankhurst (1990) noticed, “men and women are engaged in different tasks and it was unthinkable even for a slave to engage in the work of the opposite sex.” This rule of the 19th and 20th centuries is still the case in the 21st century. In particular, Ethiopian women tend to invest in activities linked to household tasks, such as preparing food and drink, spinning and embroidery, pottery and basket-weaving (*Analysis of Women’s IGA*, 1999).

On the one hand, women can reinvest their gender-based skills and know-how in an occupational activity; on the other hand, these activities are flexible



Figure 23. Constance Perrin-Joly, *Family Photo in Addis Ababa*. This picture reveals how female working activity is still struggling to rise out of the household. This woman sells vegetables, probably from her garden, in front of her house and surrounded by all her children

enough to be combined with the cultural expectation for women to take care of children, husband and relatives.

Unfortunately, these activities are less valorising and less profitable; consequently, they do not generate sufficient income. Moreover, this situation promotes blurring between household skills and women's professional competences, as if women were naturally better (instead of culturally more trained) than men in these activities. Hence, women risk being confined to their household role or work.

3.2. *Women's network: a work in progress*

This persistent division of labour has other concrete consequences: women have limited access to markets and sell above all to their neighbourhood. Linked to their general low level of education, they also encounter difficulties in accessing useful information to extend their business.

As Zewde emphasises, they suffer from lack of networking. In particular, associations of women entrepreneurs are not strong enough to lobby effectively. Nevertheless, within the last ten years, networks have been developed. We can quote, for example, the Alliance of Women Entrepreneurs Program (AWEP), the Association of Women in Business (AWiB), the Center for Accelerated Women's Economic Empowerment (CAWEE) or Women's Development Initiative Project (WDIP). The creation of the *Enat Bank* by 3 Ethiopian women in 2013 is also a positive sign. Females are in the majority

on the boards of these associations, taking up to six of the 11 seats; women own 64 percent of the bank, which aims to help women to access credit. This case study illustrates a rare situation of women breaking the glass ceiling.

Source 65. Useful indicator: SIGI

SIGI: Social Institution and Gender Index, an indicator created by the OECD to measure gender equality in different countries.

This indicator is based on 5 criteria:

- Family code (early marriage, inheritance, parental authority, initiative of divorce, maternal mortality...) is compared with some field studies about the concrete practices (for example, the survey lead by the CEDAW, Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women).
- Physical security (domestic violence, rape, sexual harassment, genital mutilation...).
- Demographic bias (calculation of the sex ratio to evaluate if women are missing).
- Resources and assets (access to land, property, access to credit...)
- Civil liberties (access to public space, political voices...)

This sort of indicator is useful to justify a comparison between two countries, to give an overview of the context of a country about gender equality and to build a sample for a survey.

Source 66. Concepts

Glass ceiling: This concept, created in the United States in the 1970s, points out an intangible barrier within a hierarchy that prevents women (or minorities) from obtaining upper-level positions. It is generally the result of an indirect or structural discrimination process.

Hegemonic masculinity: Masculinity includes the behaviour, attributes and roles considered as a specificity of men. The concept of hegemonic masculinity, created by Cornell, shows how one sort of masculinity became dominant, ensuring the subordination of women (and of other kinds of masculinity).

Conclusion

Today, there is not a single study on the history of entrepreneurship in Ethiopia, whether it is embodied by men or women. Therefore, most of the research dedicated to women entrepreneurs are macroeconomic surveys, which present an overview of the situation of female entrepreneurs in Ethiopia for the last two decades. They also conclude that promoting female entrepreneurship by microcredit is not necessarily an efficient way to empower women. Therefore, micro-sociological studies, in particular qualitative ones, could help to understand some specific social mechanisms. In particular, while

there are findings about the small-scale companies run by women or about the effect of microloans, very few scholars have analysed the key factors of the rare success of the few women in business. Describing their life stories (the history of their family, the experience of migration for women entrepreneurs from the diaspora...), analysing their resources could be useful in understanding the way to become a successful female entrepreneur.

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Shimeles Bensa Gulema
Marina de Regt

Chapter 14

Women, Work and Migration

“Migration is an expression of the human aspiration for dignity, safety and a better future. It is part of the social fabric, part of our very make-up as a human family.”

Secretary-General of the UN Ban Ki-Moon,
Secretary-General’s remarks to High-Level
Dialogue on International Migration and
Development (Ban Ki-Moon 2013, 3).

The history of migration within Ethiopia has been a history of the migration of men until at least the mid-20th century. However, this by no means confirms that women did not migrate at all because they did, albeit in small numbers, often from one rural village to another but increasingly to urban centres that were emerging in different corners of the country. There are several factors that limited female migration in the past including, but not limited to, the patriarchal nature of Ethiopia’s social organisation that deprived women of their basic rights and confined them to the household as well as the socioeconomic organisation of most Ethiopian communities which tied a peasant, more pronouncedly a woman (married, a mother, widowed, separated), to the land. It was in the best interest of a peasant to stay on the land, cultivate it, pay tribute or tax to the state; land that remained uncultivated would be subject to takeover by the state, which enjoyed extensive revisionary rights.

1. Women on the move: the imperial period

1.1. *Causes of migration during the 19th and early 20th century*

When migration occurred, it was normally led by men, who left their agricultural plots often temporarily (on a short term or seasonal basis), to offer labour services or meet military obligations. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, several communities, especially in the southern half of the country, paid their tribute or tax obligations to the state through the offer of labour services, principally in the capital city, Addis Ababa, where they stayed

for part of a year working on the construction of roads and buildings, and for the imperial household and royal estates. In time, many also migrated in search of work to earn additional income to supplement rural income or start a new life in their new habitats. Military campaigns, which caused significant population movements in the country in the 19th and early 20th century, were also largely the affairs of men. Even labour migration—both voluntary and forced—which began in the late 19th century among some of Ethiopia's communities (like the Gurage and Dorze) remained an almost exclusive preserve of men until early in the 20th century. By then, however, the principal patterns of Ethiopian women's migration were emerging and beginning to take shape.

In the first phase, independent migration of women did not exist and women moved mainly to join their fathers or husbands who were already established in new areas. The migration of most of the men, and the women, predominantly wives, who would join them later, occurred in a seasonal manner as they preferred to work temporarily in the towns at low points in the agricultural sector in their rural villages. These migrants were therefore largely reluctant townsmen and townswomen. Urban income was inadequate, urban land tenure was restrictive to many and living conditions in the towns were expensive and harsh—and significantly worse than in the rural areas.

1.2. The beginning of women's independent migration (1936–1941)

The Italian occupation (1936–1941) represented a temporary increase in the scale of migration, especially to urban centres, which saw improving employment conditions and more security than rural Ethiopia, which was engulfed in a bloody war of armed resistance. For example, Addis Ababa's population, which was about 100,000 in 1935, trebled to over 300,000 in just three years. The period saw the beginning, though to a limited degree, of independent migration by women whose lives were disrupted by the depredations of Italian atrocities and Ethiopian resistance. This would intensify in the post-liberation period, after 1941.

1.3. Large-scale urban migration for women (1941–1975)

The period from 1941 to 1975 established the fundamentals of female migration in Ethiopia. These changes occurred in the context of an economy which, though fundamentally feudal, was evolving under the pressure of global capitalism mediated through Ethiopia's peripheral insertion into the international system. The monetisation of the rural economy, changing socioeconomic conditions in the rural areas and growing resistance to institutionalised patriarchy created the conditions for the large-scale migration of women to the towns. Urban centres, also offered the opportunities to attract and absorb the 'influx' from their rural counterparts.

The changes outlined above affected women disproportionately. Let us cite two examples. Rural deprivation, which resulted from declining agricultural productivity (owing to population increase, dwindling agricultural plots, and growing demands for resources by an ever-extractive state), was more intense for women who in most cases lacked or were denied access to critical resources such as land. Rural poverty was therefore feminised to a large extent but migration, which offered a way out of poverty, was not, and it remained so until recently. Men remained the gender with the most resources but more women were breaking barriers and migrating independently and on a permanent basis. Another example concerns the entrenched patriarchy, which made life difficult or untenable for women especially those who were barren, widowed, divorced, abandoned, unmarried or young. Such women flocked to urban centres, dissatisfied with the prospects of village life, restrictive and burdensome social roles and expectations, and attracted by relative freedom and potential social mobility in the towns. There, migrant women engaged in petty trading, and to some extent were employed as domestic workers and in bars and restaurants, sometimes as sex workers. Others married and became housewives. In the process, women would constitute the majority, between 50 and 60 percent, of the population in many of the Ethiopian towns.

Urban Centers	Age Groups as percent of total pop.		Sex Ratio (Males per 100 Females)				
	Under 25	25–44	0–14	15–29	30–44	45–59	60+
Dire Dawa	57.3	29.6	99.8	68.2	94.0	132.4	54.0
Harar	55.5	8.4	90.5	69.1	77.8	116.9	66.2
Dessie	52.5	30.9	94.5	49.0	69.0	95.8	124.3
Bishoftu	52.6	33.4	82.0	51.3	87.5	101.0	75.5
D. Markos	54.0	30.0	92.0	49.1	60.8	89.3	56.7
Assela	57.0	30.0	73.8	57.4	76.4	73.2	126.1
Axum	59.2	24.0	96.3	60.9	86.0	82.0	56.6
Dilla	56.9	32.9	118.1	103.2	116.1	100.0	146.2
Lekemt	55.1	27.3	105.9	68.3	66.0	107.8	107.7
Mekele	58.0	28.4	102.1	44.4	64.4	107.3	47.1

Source: Mesfin Wolde Mariam (1966, 34).

2. Migration in a time of revolution: Socialist Ethiopia

2.1. *The revolution and its impact on women's migration*

The Ethiopian revolution in 1975 and the changes it engendered, such as the nationalisation of rural and urban land, and extra urban houses and industries, reconfigured the political economy of the country. The impact on the migration process was unmistakable although the above-mentioned factors had the effect, at least in the early years, of discouraging migration. Women

now enjoyed greater access to land ownership and such social amenities as education and health; many joined the workforce, both informal and formal, and rural peasant associations that gave them a measure of power. Yet, poverty remained disproportionately feminised thereby intensifying the conditions stimulating female migration.

2.2. The revolution and its impact on women in urban Ethiopia

The revolutionary period unleashed major processes that heightened the factors and improved the capacity for the migration of women, predominantly to the urban centres. Apart from deepening poverty and inequality between the genders, which continued despite the liberatory promises of the revolution, expanding networks of transport eased migration from rural villages. Women, increasingly young and unmarried, who sought to escape the drudgery and restrictions of rural life and/or were enthralled by the promises and possibilities, real or alleged, of the city (health, education, work, economic and social empowerment) embarked on a migration that would in time change the demography of urban Ethiopia. A 1967 survey (Imperial Ethiopian Government, *Survey of Major Towns*) found that in every major town except Addis Ababa, female migrants outnumbered their male counterparts. By 1978, even in the capital the number of women migrants was higher than men. The Ethiopian experience was therefore contrary to the situation seen in much of the developing world where male migration was prevalent.

Reasons for migrating to the city	Males		Females	
	No.	%	No.	%
Employment	77	86.6	10	52.6
To obtain education	4	4.5	-	-
To obtain medical treatment	1	1.1	-	-
Came with husband	-	-	4	21.1
Came with relatives	6	6.7	5	26.3
No answer	1	1.1	-	-
Total	89	100.0	19	100.0

Jonathan Baker (1992, 135). Data collected in 1985.

Although the majority of women stayed in their rural habitat, many migrated to urban centres where they settled down, got some education, and achieved a measure of economic independence. Such a story or a perception of success had an impact on the migration decision of many women. Some would opt to move using established networks and routes hoping to survive or succeed in a world that was increasingly complex yet still irresistible. Most women, however, found themselves at the bottom of the socioeconomic scale, leading a precarious lifestyle, and were therefore vulnerable to the volatility of urban life and to the abuse and violation of their rights and dignity.

2.3. The revolution and the beginning of international labour migration

An important development of the revolutionary period was the start of Ethiopia's international (labour) migration, in particular to the Middle East but also to neighbouring countries and to Europe and North America. While the nexus between economic deprivation and migration was still pervasive, the intensification of political instability and persecution was causing a new wave of migration, transnational in nature, involving Ethiopia's educated and politically active youth. Women, a minority, were represented in the group who were leaving the country and sometimes never returning, a new phenomenon that would intensify in the succeeding decades. The internationalisation of Ethiopian migration thus began in earnest and would become fairly feminised in the late 1990s and afterwards.

3. Migration under the EPRDF

3.1. International migration

Since 1991, freedom of movement has been a constitutional right. In the past three decades an increasing number of young women have migrated abroad, in particular to the Middle East where they are mainly employed in the service sector, in particular as domestic workers. Most of the women are between 18 and 35 years old and unmarried, and migrate to support their families (Ban Ki-Moon 2013). Rural poverty caused by, amongst other things, overpopulation, land scarcity, government agricultural policies, and a lack of agricultural resources partly explains the increased migration of young women from rural areas to the Middle East. Rural families increasingly see migration of their daughters as one of the few ways to improve their livelihoods. The migration of women to the Middle East is in most cases organised by Private Employment Agencies (PEAs), yet there are also women who migrate via brokers and smugglers, especially those who are under 18 years old because from a legal viewpoint they are not allowed to migrate across borders. Moreover, not all employment agencies are licensed, with the result that women sometimes enter the country of migration without proper documents. Undocumented women (and men) risk deportation. Women's work as domestics makes them vulnerable to abuse and exploitation, and stories of women who have been mentally, physically and sexually abused are abundant.

The Ethiopian government therefore regularly installs bans on migration to countries in the Middle East. Yet, there are also women who benefit from their migration and who are able to set up small businesses or build houses in Ethiopia.

Source 67. From place to place: Interview of Bortukan

“Dubai was my first destination. I was cleaning 18 separate rooms, 6 bathrooms, I did the laundry and prepared food for the whole family. I was doing all these tasks alone. After finishing my contract, they decided to send me back without any reason. When I was in Dubai airport I ran away to Abu Dhabi and I worked there with a runaway status for one year. The police caught and arrested me while I was working and they deported me to Ethiopia. After deportation my plan was to migrate again. I decided to migrate to Qatar. I paid 7,000 Birr to a local broker. In Qatar the madam didn’t want me to keep my personal hygiene but I always kept myself clean. When I would clean myself, the madam would get upset as she considered it the behavior of a prostitute. But the rest of the family was nice to me. The madam sent me back because she wanted me to be dirty.”

Bortukan, a 28-year-old returnee in Addis Ababa in 2014, interview published in Marina De Regt, *Research Report: Time to Look at Girls: Adolescent Girls’ Migration in Ethiopia* (Geneva: Global Migration Centre of the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, April 2016), 40.

3.2. *Internal migration*

Internal migration of young women has also increased since the 1990s. In addition to helping their families, adolescent girls also migrate in order to escape oppressive gender regimes, for example by running away from gender-based violence such as forced (and early) marriages. Moreover, the lack of educational and employment opportunities for women in rural areas inspires migration to urban areas. In many cases secondary education is only available in rural towns with the result that adolescent girls have to move out of the village to continue their schooling. Sometimes girls join their relatives in bigger towns intending to continue their education but end up doing domestic work instead. In cases where they encounter abuse and exploitation, they may run away and take up sex work. The number of young female sex workers in Addis Ababa and other urban centres has increased since the 2000s. Whereas sex work sometimes gives migrant girls more freedom of movement and a higher income, there are high risks of abuse and exploitation. In addition, sex work is highly stigmatised. Another group of internal migrant women are young women who move to the cities to continue higher education. They often live on campuses, and enter the formal labour market after having finished their education.

Conclusion

Migration is a global force that is central in the making and remaking of our world. Its significance has considerably increased over the last fifty or so years in response to and/or as a result of globalisation and advances in technology. A powerful, yet under-recognised, group driving these global phenomena is women. Ethiopian women, like their counterparts elsewhere,

have for a long time been on the move in search of better opportunities. Real or imagined differences in living standards, security, and freedom force many women to leave their villages, small towns, and increasingly their country of origin to destinations they see as places of opportunities for personal and familial advancement. Ethiopian women's migration has, over time, become more permanent, increasingly transnational, and deeply transformative. However, one should avoid the risk of either homogenising women migrants as an undifferentiated group of people for they are very diverse, or equating migration, national and transnational, with advancement as many fall through the cracks and are forced to eke out a living in degrading, even violent, circumstances. There is therefore a need to develop a differentiated, yet inclusive, and expansive framework and vocabulary of social analysis to understand the nature, extent, significance, and enduring consequences of Ethiopian women's migration and how migration informs their view of themselves, their place in society but also the world, and their relations to the state.

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Part 7

Women, Family, and Law

Habtamu M. Tegegne

Chapter 15

Women, Property and Inheritance in Ethiopia (mid-18th to early 20th centuries)

“For men and women alike, land is the foundation for security, shelter, and livelihood, supports women’s dignity and creates pathways to empowerment and economic opportunity.”

Karol Boudreaux, Chief Program Officer, Global campaign “Stand For Her Land” March 25, 2019.

We have many books on land tenure in general, but few scholars have explored the gendered dimension of property holding, ignoring the fact that women were as equally important landholders as men. “Women and Property” was a theme first developed by the historian Donald Crummey, but until now, no one has followed up his innovative line of inquiry. This chapter focuses on the legal status of women in marital property arrangements and inheritances, which have been at the centre of feminist research in other historiographic traditions. Land was the primary form of permanent property that Ethiopian women possessed, although they could also own moveable assets, such as cattle. This chapter discusses how women dealt with property to show how rights secured by Ethiopian law empowered them from the mid-18th century until the beginning of the 20th century.

1. Methodological approach

These references are drawn from documents in Ethiopian churches and monasteries photographed by the author. The title of the manuscript is given first, followed by the name of the church and the digital exposure number.

1.1. *Primary sources: Property transactions*

The primary research base is land-related property transactions and land registers recorded by professional scribes attached to churches and monasteries in northern Ethiopia, in the former provinces of Bāgemädär and Goḡgam. While many property transfer deeds are written on flyleaves or endpaper

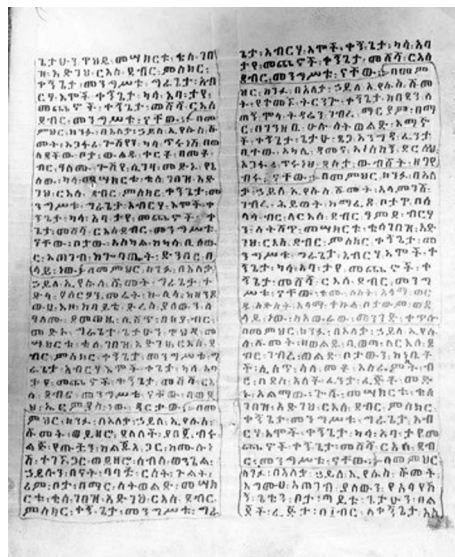
Däbrä Marqos, <i>Mäzgäb</i> , # 191–275	Däbrä Marqos, <i>Yärest Mäzgäb</i> , # 262–359.
Däbrä-Wärq, <i>Dersanä-Miqa'el</i> , picture # 3892	Däbrä Wärq, <i>Yärest Mäzgäb</i> , # 6205–6294
Däbrä Sähay Q ^w əsq ^w am, <i>Mäzgäb</i> , # 019–201	Mähäl Zägé Giyorgis, <i>Yärest Mäzgäb</i> , # 033–578
Märtulä Maryam, <i>Däqiqä Nübeyat</i> , f. 194r-264v	Moṭa Giyorgis, <i>Yärest Mäzgäb</i> , # 4089–6516.
Moṭa Giyorgis, Wängel, picture # 4457	Moṭa Giyorgis, <i>Mäsehäfä Manaḳosat</i> , # 4487–4500.

and margins of manuscripts, there are also manuscripts consisting exclusively of legal documents which are called *yärest mäzgäb* or “register of inheritance deeds,” which were separate from land registers usually accompanying church charters. Women and their property dealings appear throughout these manuscripts from about 1740 to 1974. Surviving texts record all forms of land-related property and social transactions one could imagine: leases, gifts, selling and buying, marriage endowments, inheritances, and legal dispute resolutions, to name but a few. Geographical coverage is limited to large towns with churches in both Bägəmədər and Goḡḡam. While men appear frequently in these documents, references to women are also significant in number. These materials clearly represent a very small and privileged group of women with access to wealth and property, but they also provide material for a deeper analysis of women’s property rights. Little used as historical sources until now, these records reveal a glimpse of the lived experiences of women recorded there through which we can analyse their individual socioeconomic status. These preserved landed property records show that women were actively involved in a wide range of initiatives: they were administrators, church founders, family leaders, property owners, slave owners, bequeathers of land—all pursuits which frame the wider economic, social, and political landscape of the period under study.

1.2. *The argument*

Despite their political subordination, women in Ethiopian society have historically held greater autonomy than has been recognised to date. This argument can be illustrated in three ways. First, evidence in the landed property records themselves demonstrates that women throughout the period of this study were secure in their rights pertaining to landholding. While legally possessing such rights does not confirm that they exercised them in all circumstances, both men and women were recognised as holding those rights equally. Second, women routinely employed the prevailing landholding system to their own advantage and fully recognised the scope of their privileges in this regard. My study identifies two kinds of land transfer or property relationship in which women

Figure 24. Habtamu M. Tegegne, *A folio from the Mota register (Yärest Mäzgäb, #4089)*. This manuscript page shows eight different texts. The scribe has distinguished each document from the others by the use of lined boxes. Four women, *wäyzäro** Dälälälč, *wäyzäro** Säblä Wängel, *wäyzäro** Yätämägnu Terengo, and *wäyzäro** Alämnäš Gäbrä Hiwot, appear as parties to three out of eight land transaction documents included in this manuscript page.



particularly participated actively: inheritances, and bequests involving adoption. However, inheritance and bequests do not exhaust the business dealings of women, who are depicted as parties to all kinds of property transfers and the implied social and economic transactions. In this context, women participated in transactions taking the form of land sales and purchases. Third, women's broad property rights mitigated their subordinate position in other areas of society in which gender inequality prevailed, thus offering them the means of acquiring economic security in old age, an independent source of money, a legacy for memorialising and spirituality, and economic independence beyond mere survival.

2. Women, wills and property

Ethiopian inheritance rules offer an institutional point of view on the socio-economic position of women. Although some women acquired their landed properties in the open market, most acquired land through testamentary bequests or inheritance gifts from friends, parents and other relatives. Ethiopian civil law decreed that women were to receive shares of both their parents' and husband's assets and estates. Some noble families appointed their daughters as preferred family leaders and heirs. Women's rights to inheritance were typically uncontested and universally respected throughout the mid-18th to mid-20th centuries.

2.1. Women, property, and family leadership

Ethiopian noblemen and noblewomen had developed a system of inheritance and family leadership or seniority known as the *aläqenät*. This system entitled

one child designated as leader to inherit the majority of the family estate and/or assets, while relegating any other children to the status of *dehenät*, or subordinate heirs, who shared the remaining amount. The will of *Däğğac** Haylu Əšäte, a cousin of Queen Məntəwwab (1730–1769) is an interesting case involving women and inheritance (see Source 68). Records of a dispute settlement shows that Haylu divided, in *circa* 1809, his property, including cattle in Bägəmədər and Goğğam unequally among five heirs. His will stated that one of his two daughters, Adga, was to be married; the second, Mərşit, was to become *aläqa* or family leader and principal heir, receiving two-thirds of the estate. As family leader, Mərşit was also required to provide military service when called for. Haylu's son Gošu was named a lesser beneficiary; along with Adga, he was to share the remaining one-third of the inheritance. But Haylu had excluded another son, Wäldä Täkle, from receiving any of his estate. Although Mərşit had been given complete control over her share and had the authority conferred by her father, a violent struggle broke out with her less-favoured brothers after their father's death. The conflict ended with reconciliation and a settlement which radically revised the original terms of the inheritance. Elder arbiters and relatives decreed that Mərşit had to share the family estate more equitably with her brothers. This resulted in Wäldä Täkle, formerly disowned by his father, being readmitted into the family. As an instrument of potential inequality, the tradition of *aläqenät** worked against the principle of impartial inheritance.

Source 68. *Däğğac** Haylu Əšäte

"*Däğğazmac** Haylu, when he died, gave the *aläqənät* to *wäyzäro** Mersit. (Her brother) *Abeto** Gošu took her to court over this *aläqenät*, appealing to the judgment of *däğğazmac** Gugsä. *abeto** Gošu lost the case. After this they were reconciled... And the agreement was that *wäyzäro** Mersit, having assumed the *aläqənät*, should allocate the land and cattle. (In the case of) a military campaign, *wäyzäro** Mersit should campaign."

Crummey, Donald, "Three Amharic Documents of Marriage and Inheritance from the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," in *Proceedings of the Eighth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, University of Addis Ababa, 1984*, edited by Taddese Beyene (Addis Ababa: IES, vol. 1, 1988), 316.

There are many other inheritance documents whereby women are declared as universal heirs, family leaders and property managers, even though their prominence went against the strong patrilineal preferences of Ethiopian law. These women played economic and administrative roles usually reserved for men, such as providing soldiers in the case of Mərşit who became her family's leader, or *aläqa*, not because there was no man to claim the title, but because her father preferred her over his sons. As a system of inheritance, *aläqenät* enabled Ethiopian noblemen and women to perpetuate their lineage and set rules

governing the relationship between their descendants and heirs. Although Meršit was challenged by her brothers and ultimately agreed to share her inheritance with them, her rights as Haylu's successor and principal heir was confirmed, testifying that women's role as family leader was taken for granted in Ethiopia at that time.

2.2. Women and illegitimate children

Women also drew up inheritance documents in favour of their daughters, excluding illegitimate children from inheritance if they chose. The will of Sehen, daughter of *däggazmač** Ayo, governor of Bägemädär during the 1740s through 1760s, provides the best example. Dated from 1803/4, copies of her will survive in the archives of three churches in Goğğam. Sehen appointed her daughter Hirut Kenfu as universal heir with the power to "disinherit and establish" her siblings and manage the family property. This is most likely because Sehen owed her daughter a staggering debt of 500 *wäqet* (ounces) of gold, 10 mules and an unknown number of cattle. The details of this will vividly illustrate the considerable autonomy women had with regard to the disposal of their property and the choice of heirs and successors.

Sehen ordered that her illegitimate children be excluded from the inheritance and specifically requested that they refrain from disturbing Hirut. This case affirms that although all children were theoretically entitled to share equally in their parents' estates, parents could disinherit them at will, especially illegitimate ones. Historically, Ethiopians appear to have been generous and inclusive regarding the rights and entitlements of illegitimate children, but as the case of Sehen's will demonstrates, this benign attitude was not universal.

Source 69. Wayzaro Sehen's will

"In the year of creation of the world, 7296 (1803/4), in the year of John (the Evangelist), in the reign of Emperor Gwalu [1801–1818], when *əməyte** *wäyzäro** Sehen, daughter of *däggazmač** Ayo, established the affairs of her house, she said "I have given the *gult* (land) which I acquired from my mother and my father to my daughter Kenfu Hirut. The reason for my gift is that a child inherits her mother's cattle; she (Hirut), in contrast, gave me whatever she had from the day of my youth until the time I was shorn as a nun. If there are bastards from among her brothers, they should beg her (for shares) and if she wishes to give them, let them take (receive) (...) Whoever she disinherits, let him be disinherited and whomever she establishes, let him be established."

Habtamu Mengistie Tegegne, *Lord, Zega and Peasant: A Study of Property and Agrarian Relations in Rural Eastern Gojjam* (Addis Ababa: Forum for Social Studies, 2004), 151.

The cases of Meršit and Hirut reveal that women, regardless of other gender and status inequalities, received property and assumed responsibilities

normally reserved for men. As a whole, provisions concerning the inheritance rights of daughters and wives could be justly described as liberal.

2.3. Dowry and marriage

In addition to testamentary bequests, the second most frequent means for women to acquire property was through marriage gifts. According to Ethiopian law, the bride's parents provided her dowry or personal property (ተላቲ). It usually took the form of livestock, slaves, real estate or agricultural land. Her trousseau (ጣጩ), consisting mostly of household items, jewellery and ceremonial dress, was contributed by the groom or his parents.

The marriage of the unnamed daughter of *däggāzmač** Adäru and the unnamed son of *ras** Wädajä during the first half of the 18th century is a good example of this practice. Adäru was a close relative of the famed Queen Mäntäwwab and served briefly as governor of Goğğam during the 1750s. Wädajä was governor of Amhara from the 1750s through the 1770s. A document listing all the properties the new groom received through his marriage to Adäru's daughter is kept at the church of Däbrä Wärq.

As was typical, the newlywed couple's property comprised both moveable and permanent goods. According to the inventory, from his mother the groom received extensive lands in 25 localities across the province of Amhara, while from his father he received 500 cows, 100 pairs of oxen, 50 weapons, 200 *wäqet* of gold, 10 mules, 10 horses, and 10 swords, among other items. Unfortunately, we do not have any itemised records of the bride's dowry (or even her name). Throughout the marriage, this couple held and managed their properties jointly, as well as those they acquired over the years following their wedding.

It is also important to note that under Ethiopian law, husbands and wives could also inherit their deceased partner's assets. The best example is found in an early 20th-century will held at the church of Märṭulä Maryam. The husband, *liqämäkwas** Lemäneh, willed his land to his wife, *wäyzäro** Yewagu, showing that he acknowledged and respected her right to the land. Noteworthy too is the fact that he did not insist she remain a widow, leaving her the right to choose whether or not to remarry. Additionally, the liberal Ethiopian practice of the time was that when a marriage ended in divorce, the wife was usually given back any land received from her parents.

3. Women and bequests

Thousands of bequests written at the initiative of women survive in church archives in Goğğam and Gondär, revealing women's will-making customs of the period. These female-authored testaments strengthen the argument that Ethiopian women enjoyed considerable autonomy. First, evidence from these records demonstrates that women were as familiar with the formulae and technicalities of making a bequest as their male counterparts. Regardless

of their social standing or marital status, they claimed the right to pass property on to heirs of their choosing. These recorded female testators included wives, unmarried women, and widows, the latter being slightly more numerous. Second, land was the most common form of property transacted in these testaments, although women did also bequeath household items and other moveable assets. Third, these independently-composed documents are concrete evidence that women could dispose of their own property as they saw fit. Women made wills routinely without the need of male guardians or representatives.

3.1. Women, adoption and the choice of heirs

Women named a wide range of beneficiaries in their wills, demonstrating that they were wholly free to determine their heirs and successors. As might be expected, most women named their children as heirs, but some designated their brothers and sisters instead. Two representative examples from the first half of the 20th century are found at the church of Märtulä Maryam. In the first, a woman named Yeneneš Gošu bequeathed all her lands to her brother, Tässäma, and sister, Yešumneš. In the second case, Terengo Kassa designated her brother Embi'alä Kassa as heir, despite the fact that her children should have been made heirs according to Ethiopian custom. Terengo even added a clause to the will disallowing her children and other siblings from inheriting any of her estate.

In some instances, women's heirs were their husbands, or vice versa; in other instances, the relationship between testator and beneficiary is unclear. In a will written during 1927/28 in the town of Moṭa, *wäyzäro** Bezunäš registered land with her husband, *Fitäwari* Imeru, and declared him her heir. Imeru in turn stipulated that Bezunäš would inherit his property, should she outlive him. The couple likely composed their wills together and then registered their lands, declaring each other heir with no stipulations, and no insistence upon continued widowhood for Bezunäš if she were to survive her husband. Naming one's spouse (or other non-blood-related individual) as one's heir through technically "adopting" him or her as one would do with a child, was an accepted though uncommon legal practice. It is reasonable to expect that one instance of its use would be in cases where a couple had no children to succeed them. These atypical cases show the degree of autonomy that women exerted in both inheriting and bequeathing property.

Property was usually passed on according to general succession customs. While most women passed their property to their biological children and/or agnatic (male lineage) relatives, however, they did not do so exclusively. Legal adoption could be employed to name non-traditional heirs, thus bypassing customary inheritance practices that gave succession rights only to natural or biological heirs. By this means, adopted children and others of the testator's

choosing were not only eligible to a share in an inheritance, but could also be designated as *aläqa*, or family leader and principal heir. With adoption-related inheritances, the distinction between so-called “natural” and “legitimate” children became blurred. This is especially true for inheritances involving slaves, who figure in a host of testaments found in the church archives of Märṭulä Maryam, Moṭa, Däbrä Wärq and Däbrä Marqos; many of these documents were drawn up at the behest of women.

During the early 20th century in Märṭulä Maryam, Yätämäññu Engeda first freed and then adopted her slave, Tälčakolu, as one of her children. Consequently, Tälčakolu was included as one of her heirs. In exchange, Yätämäññu required that after her death Tälčakolu would pay for annual anniversary masses and memorial feasts for her soul.

A similar testament was written by Bezabeš Kassa, widow of the priest *aläqa** Rätta. As she was childless, Bezabeš freed and then adopted her three named slaves in order to qualify them to legally inherit her land; the three received property rights and benefits without any limitations, just as biological heirs would have. Several other documents in Goğğam church archives also describe women allocating or bequeathing property to their slaves. It is revealing to find that women were predominant in cases where slaves were adopted as surrogate children in order to be declared heirs. Moreover, properties acquired and bequeathed in this manner were beyond the control of testators’ biological children and relatives.

The example of Bezabeš and others like her demonstrates the range of practical choices and considerable personal autonomy available to women concerning property disposal and also demonstrates the flexibility of Ethiopian inheritance law at the time. The majority of women cited in the foregoing examples could be regarded as local elite individuals but not high enough in social stature to belong to the nobility. All of the documents discussed show that transferring property outside the main lines of family descent was in fact not out of the ordinary. Widows and childless women accounted for the largest range of choice concerning heirs, naming not only their blood relations, but also slaves and other non-related beneficiaries. As a whole, women were the most active adopters of non-related heirs and therefore influential as givers of land. Only in a very few cases are women identified as adoptees or receivers of bequests from non-related testators.

3.2. Purpose and timing of testamentary bequests

The main purpose for drawing up wills was motivated by social and secular concerns, rather than religious necessity. For men and women alike, age and physical well-being largely determined the timing and content of their wills. Although there are instances of wills written when testators were still in good health and physically active, most women wrote their testaments during

old age and/or times of infirmity; whether married, unmarried, or widowed, they tended to defer will-making until there was anticipation of death or incompetence. They wrote wills for a wide variety of reasons, including the pressures of debt, lack of biological heirs, and to show love and affection to their preferred successors.

Many women categorically stated that they bequeathed their land because of debts of gratitude they owed to their adoptees and natural heirs. Two examples illustrate this motivation. The first is that of Terengo Kassa who, as seen before, left her land to an adopted brother, Embi'alä Kassa. Explaining the reasons for her bequest, Terengo stated that her brother had helped her and also acknowledged that she owed him 100 silver thalers. Likewise, the contents of Sehen's testament, also cited above, were motivated by both debt and gratitude, especially the enormous debt owed to her daughter Hirut. In fact, the debt alone may have been the main reason for drawing up the will as a form of guaranteed settlement.

Exclusionary wills were written when women sought to disinherit adopted children when the latter proved irresponsible, misbehaved, or failed to care for them. The 1932 will of *uäyzäro** Kassayä Ali who lived in Moṭa is a case in point. Kassayä disinherited her former adopted children, *aläqa* Mängəstu and Webə Gətahun; in their place she adopted an unnamed male as her child and bequeathed her property to him.

Source 70. The Testament of Yäwärq Wuha Wäldä Her and the organization of commemorative feasts

"During *däggazmač* Birru's *däggazmač* (1840–1853), during the *aläqenät* of *Fitäwari** Merid (...) Yäwärq Wuha Wäldä she adopted Asfa (as her son) and bequeathed the land she inherited from her mother... She swore a binding oath when she adopted (Asfa) and bequeathed her land (...) upon her death he (Asfa) shall provide a commemorative feast for her. Again, lest she should change her mind Asfa Tässäma has received a guarantor."

Habtamu Mengistie Tegegne, *Lord, Zega and Peasant: A Study of Property and Agrarian Relations in Rural Eastern Gojjam* (op. cit.), 152.

For the most part, women used wills for the distribution of their worldly assets and settlement of material obligations. But equally important was the use of wills and testaments for religious purposes; that is, to ensure their eternal salvation. When the stated purpose of a will was religious, the major concern of such testaments was the organisation of funerals, anniversary masses and memorial feasts. An example of this form of inheritance is that of Yäwärq Wuha Wäldä Hər, who first adopted *fitäwari** Asfa and then bequeathed to him all the land she had inherited from her mother during the 1840s. Found in Märtulä Maryam church collections, the document of the bequest stated that

Yäwärq Wuha was to be taken care of during the remainder of her long life. She also stipulated that the cost of organising anniversary masses and memorial feasts in her honour was to be paid from the assets of the inheritance, now held by her adopted child Asfa. Several other women used their testamentary gifts to honour and memorialise themselves after death through similar provisions to fund memorial feasts and masses. In a document drawn at Märtulä Maryam, for instance, we read that a testator Ṭädal Ṭedu adopted *ras* Ḥaylu, governor of Goğğam (1910–1932), and bequeathed her lands to him. In recompense, Ḥaylu gave her 18 silver thalers for food and clothing. Additionally, Ṭädal's land bequest was on condition that Ḥaylu sponsor a memorial meal on the anniversaries of her death and funeral. Other women did not give particular reasons for their bequests.

4. Women, church land and the land market

4.1. *Women and church landholding*

Women could also hold *rim** lands distributed on behalf of churches by church founders and grantors. Although churches were always male-dominated spaces, women are also found listed among those serving the ecclesiastical establishment. Women were restricted from holding church office but found ways to work within religious and social constraints when it came to owning church-affiliated land. This role was evidently deemed acceptable by male administrators, as women appear in lists of landholders under church jurisdiction. The most important form of property women held under church jurisdiction was *rim* land and it would often be allocated in exchange for specific services, such as some liturgical tasks required or permitted to women. While laywomen typically did not participate personally in religious services and ceremonies, they could appoint qualified male proxies to provide those services on their behalf.

Besides holding land from churches, noblewomen from affluent noble families took on significant roles as church founders and benefitted materially from their investment in ecclesiastical communities. In this context, ruling-class women enjoyed much of the privilege and status of their male counterparts. Affluent noblewomen availed themselves of opportunities to engage in various forms of cultural patronage and were more highly regarded for doing so. They not only established ecclesiastical institutions, but made massive sustaining grants to them, which benefitted them, their families and the communities attached to the churches they supported. Queen Məntəwwab and her daughter Wälättä Əsra'el offer striking examples of the influence and power that independent upper-class women wielded in establishing churches and making significant tenurial interventions in Ethiopia's landholding system. Both women possessed substantial holdings within the lands attached to Məntəwwab's major foundation, the church of Däbrä Šähay Q^wəsq^wam,

founded during the 1730s and 1740s. Her daughter Wälättä Ḥsra'el granted an immense amount of property to relatives and other members of the ruling class in Goḡgam and Bāgemädär, as well as establishing and endowing churches that could rival royal foundations churches in their size and wealth. She commissioned the building of Moṭa Giyorgis church during the late 1760s and endowed at least five smaller convents, including donating paintings and financing the copying of liturgical books and objects. Although her foundation and grants are recorded officially as having been given by her nephew Iyo'as, Wälättä Ḥsra'el independently controlled the granting of extensive amounts of land. In this way, she and others like her were able to operate with almost as much effect and autonomy as male nobility.

4.2. Women and the land market

As we have seen, women's names appear throughout land transaction documents in church collections. These property records also show that women served as guarantors, usually on behalf of men rather than for other women. For the reason which is not evident in the documents themselves, women are more frequently recorded, it is interesting to note, as sellers rather than purchasers of land. As Crummey noted in his 1981 study, during the 18th and 19th centuries women chiefly sold land they had already acquired through their family connections. Crummey discovered that out of the 5,304 individuals registered in land transactions in Gondär between 1740 and 1850, 1,136 (just over 21 percent) were women. He further notes that 810 sales accounting for 42.3 percent of all the transactions "involved at least one woman." Thus far fewer women than men were independently involved in land transactions of sale or purchase.

4.3. Women's rights in property alienation

The disproportionately high number of men who purchased and sold land in these records should not suggest, however, that women exercised much less freedom than their male counterparts. Although this is an issue meriting further research, I argue that the numerical underrepresentation of women in land purchase and sale documents reflects instead the weakness of available sources. Land sale documents often omitted contextual details that may have been too familiar to the participants to warrant recording them. Whether land was acquired during marriage or later, one can assume that husbands required their wives' consent to sell, give away, or otherwise dispose of any jointly owned property. Women could thus have sales made by their husbands without their consent annulled. It is also logical to expect that many women probably recruited their sons, brothers, husbands, or other male relatives to act for them in land transactions for simple reasons of convenience and efficiency. But as we have seen, that did not preclude women acting autonomously

to initiate land transactions without male approval or supervision. Women routinely went to church registration offices to exert their rights and fulfil other criteria which were the same as for men—namely, that property sales and divisions were subject to customary Ethiopian inheritance laws.

Conclusion

There is no doubt or debate that 18th and 19th century Ethiopian society was clearly patriarchal. However, sources used in this study contradict the usual historical assumption that women were passive, especially in land administration roles. In reality, their autonomy and personal agency exceeded that of women in many other cultures of that time. Ethiopian law gave women distinctly empowering property rights, but no more so than over landownership. They routinely and easily exercised those rights in drawing up binding legal contracts. While a married woman's landed property came under her husband's administrative control, she retained legal ownership; the husband could not sell it without her consent. A woman's freedom to bequeath was also an important element of Ethiopian inheritance law. Women had the liberty to choose their own heirs, whether or not they produced offspring, and could even use technical adoption procedures to bypass inheritance customs and laws in order to bequeath assets to whomever they chose.

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Chapter 16

Women and Education in Ethiopia since the End of the 19th century

“Your gender shouldn’t determine whether you get an education.”

Tirunesh, 15, Ethiopia (cited in Yusuf Akinpelu, “Educate The Girl Child For The Nation To Prosper,” October 30, 2107, posted by Akeem Alao on [Edugist.org](https://edugist.org)).

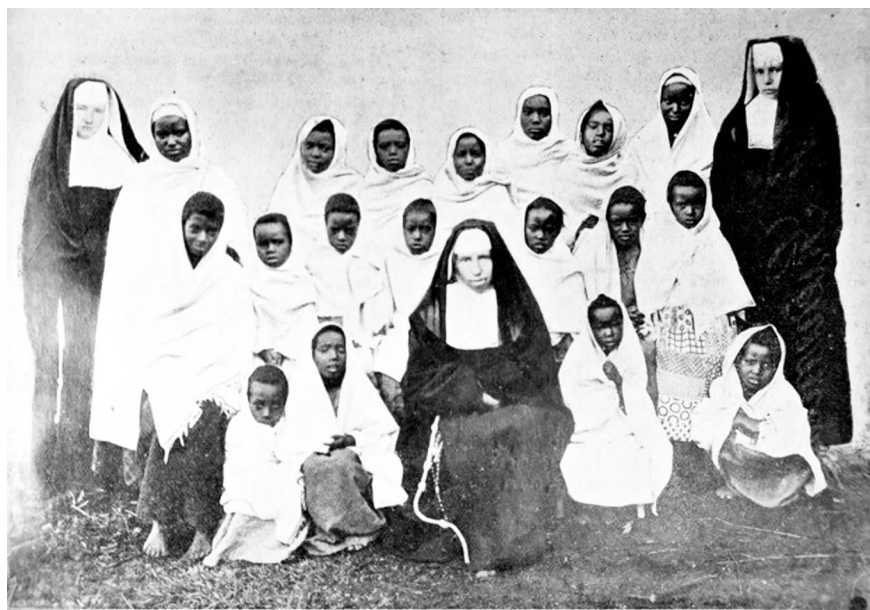
In most parts of the world, including Ethiopia, formal schooling has progressively become one of the main state institutions to shape individuals and social groups. School education is closely related to nation-state building and scholars have demonstrated how this process is gendered: nation-states have redefined gendered roles, reinforcing or transforming former ones, and schooling is instrumental in order to achieve this social, economic, cultural, and political reshaping. Decades of educational research has also demonstrated the different ways in which formal schooling fosters social reproduction, as well as social change. While reinforcing gendered divisions and hierarchies, schooling is also an opportunity for girls and women to improve their situation in society and to emancipate themselves. This chapter starts with a brief historical overview of girls’ and women’s education in Ethiopia. It then outlines some of its contents and aims, before giving some glances at the social effect of girls’ and women’s education on women’s lives, work, and public participation.

1. A short history of the education of girls and women in Ethiopia since the end of the 19th century

1.1. *Teaching “ladies” during the rule of Haylä Selasse (1930–1974)*

With the Orthodox Church school system and Koranic schools, Ethiopia has a century-old educational history. But these institutions, which trained clerics as well as laymen in the service of religious and political powers, were hardly open to girls and women, except for basic literacy and basic knowledge of scriptures. Therefore, before the end of the 19th century, very few women were literate, and most of them were from the nobility.

At the end of the 19th century, Protestant and Catholic missionaries provided school education to Ethiopian women. In the 1870s, Swedish missionaries started with schools for both boys and girls, in Massäwa and Geleb. Around 50 female students, mostly freed slaves and orphans, learned church history, catechism, general (European) history, geography, and languages (Amharic, Oromiffa, Swedish, and German), as well as sewing and basketry. Outstanding women were schooled there, such as Aster Gäno who translated the Bible into Oromiffa together with Onesimos Näsib. While the Catholic Lazarists also had a girls' school in Northern Ethiopia, the French Franciscan Sisters started providing school education for girls in their orphanage in Harar. In 1910, they opened a school in Addis Ababa, with separate classes for girls from lower and upper class families. The first group learned how to manage an average Ethiopian home, while the second learned academic knowledge, "refined" manners and skills, following the trends of what was expected from bourgeois and aristocratic ladies in Europe. In the 1920s, the sisters were running 10 schools, mostly in Eastern Ethiopia, teaching 357 female students. In 1924, the Swedish Evangelical Mission opened a girls' school in Addis Ababa. In 1936, they enrolled more girls than boys, 84 and 77 respectively. This testifies to a social demand for girls' schooling, at least in some sectors of Ethiopian society.



GALLAS. — LES RELIGIEUSES FRANCISCAINES DE LAFTO ET LEURS ÉLÈVES; reproduction d'une photographie du R. P. THEODORE, capucin.

Figure 25. Les Missions Catholiques, *The Franciscan Sisters of Lafto and their students*

1.2. Teaching girls and women during the reign of *Haylā Selasse* (1930–1974)

In 1931, the government opened the Empress Menen School. Conceived as a female counterpart of the Teferi Mekonnen School, which took in only boys, it accommodated around 80 girls from the Ethiopian nobility and expatriate families. The ladies learned Amharic, French, arithmetic, history, geography, drawing, cooking, and health care.

Source 71. The teachings given at Menen school

As Menen school's headmistress, the French Madam Garicoix, said in 1935:

“የምናስተምራቸውም ልዩ ልዩ ነገሮች ከዚህ ቀጥሎ ያሉት ናቸው፦ ልጆቹ በትምህርትና በጠባይ እየተሻሻሉ እንዲሁም ማበረታታት ÷ በምልካም አስተዳደግ መታዘዝንና ሥልጣንናን ማስለመድ፣ በሥርዓት ማዘጋጀትንና ንጽሕናን ማስተማር ÷ ባማርኛ እንዲሠለጥኑ መድከም ÷ የውጭ አገር ቋንቋ እንዲያውቁ መጣጣር ÷ ትዳር በዚያ ጊዜ ቤታቸው እንዲያስገቡና በዕረፍታቸው ጊዜ የሚጠቅም ሥራ እንዲሠሩ የእጅ ሥራ ስፈት ባለሟያነት ማስተማር። ይህ ካለቀ በኋላ ግን ወጥ አሠራርና በሽተኛ ማስታመም እናስተምራቸዋለን።”

Berhanenna Sālam, August 10, 1931, 3.

Translation: “Here are the different topics we teach: we help them improve their instruction and behaviour, with a good education; we accustom them to obedience and good manners; we teach well-ordered organization and cleanliness; we work at refining their Amharic; we do everything to have them learn foreign languages. For their future in the home, we teach them sewing, so they can make their house attractive and spend their spare time doing useful work. After this, we teach them cooking and health care.”

As in the missionary schools, the greatest attention was paid to moral education, good manners, and obedience. Before the Italian occupation, some high-class families sent their daughters abroad for further education. Such was the case of Sənəddu Gäbru, who studied in Switzerland, served as headmistress of Empress Menen School in the 1950s, wrote several literary works, and was the first woman elected to parliament. We can also mention Täblat Rädä, who studied in Khartoum and who wrote in 1926 a paper in defence of girls' education in the newspaper *Bərhanənnā Səlam*.

After the liberation, the national school system was established in relation with Emperor *Haylā Šəllase's* nation-building and centralizing project. The mission schools were required to follow the national curriculum. They were, therefore, well integrated into the national system. Coeducation was the norm, except in some elite schools, both governmental and mission, which were single-sex. For instance, Teferi Mekonnen, Wingate and Saint Joseph were boys' schools, while Menen and Saint Mary were girls' schools. Compared with males, female students were very few. In 1959–1960, girls made up 22% of the student population at primary level and 7% at secondary level. In 1974, the proportions were 27% and 17%, respectively. At university level, girls were only 6% of the student body in 1974. The social background of female and male

students differed. While male students came from social classes ranging from the upper class to farmers' families, the social origins of schoolgirls were more homogeneous. Most of those who continued after primary education were of urban high-class or middle-class origin. The main reasons were that families were unwilling to send their daughters far from home for further schooling, or else they interrupted their education for marriage.

1.3. Learning for the masses since the Därg period

The *Därg* period was a turning point in education in general and in girls' education, in particular. The socialist outlook implied mass education. The policy was to spread basic education to all the population through the literacy campaign and the building of primary schools in every *wäräda*. The urban poor and farmers' girls and women were strongly encouraged to join literacy classes and attend primary schools. In addition, they were willing to get formal education. As a result, in 1991, girls represented around 40% of the student body at primary and secondary levels. This trend has continued until today and, now gender parity has almost been achieved at primary and secondary levels. Moreover, an affirmative action policy for women to join higher education facilitates their entrance at university level (Ministry of Education 2010).

2. Forms of gender socialisation in schools

Quantitative progress does not mean the end of male domination, and gender parity does not mean gender equality. Gender socialization in schools is pivotal to understanding the shaping, reproduction, and transformation of gender relations.

2.1. From teaching how to be a good housewife to learning "women's work"

At first, girls' schooling aimed at making good wives and mothers of them. Within the modernisation theories framework that dominated educational discourses in the 1950s-1960s, the women's roles were to reform the family in society (i.e. the private sphere), while men's role was to reform the administration of the state (i.e. the public sphere). For instance, the contents of a home economics textbook were "human relations" (including especially "family life"), clothing and tailoring, childcare, hygiene, nutrition, health and domestic resources management. This school subject tailored especially for girls focused on the rationalisation of domestic tasks (house activities planning and accounting to maximise the management of resources, time and energy), on science (medicine and pedagogy), and on moral education (respect for family hierarchies, husband and wife sharing of decisions in the framework of pacified human relations). Women were to be "professional housewives," the bearers and keepers of these domestic reforms (Ministry of Education and

Fine Arts 1971). Increasingly, starting from the 1950s, women were directed towards “women’s work”: nurses, teachers at the primary level, and secretaries, jobs which are extensions of women’s roles in the family. To some extent, this trend has continued until today. While more and more school-educated women are entering the labour market, they are confined to women’s work, and the most prestigious careers are reserved for men. Nevertheless, thanks to their school education, women are progressively and slowly entering male bastions and becoming lawyers, engineers, medical doctors etc.

2.2. A gendered school socialisation: the stereotypes

School socialisation is in itself gendered. In textbooks, females are less often represented than males and gendered stereotypes are numerous. Schematically speaking, women are pictured as docile, obedient, weak etc. and restricted to women’s roles. On the contrary, men are characterised as courageous, with competitive spirit, and powerful. In class, teachers have tended to encourage males’ participation rather than females, and have often considered boys more gifted than girls in academic achievements. These trends are slowly changing over time. For instance, some improvements are noticeable today regarding the representation of women in the textbooks. Moreover, the increased number of women teachers helps to correct the gendered biases in pedagogical relationships.

3. School education, women’s work, and women’s activism

3.1. Changes are visible in urban areas

School education has given rise to a new social group of women, who are visible in the public sphere: the urban middle-class women who are working in offices, in teaching, in nursing, and in administration. But some lower-class women with little formal education have sometimes managed to strengthen their positions to gain more autonomy. After the literacy campaign in the 1980s and with adult education programs today, thanks to their new literacy skills more and more women are opening little shops, working as health assistants etc.; they are also encouraging their daughters to continue furthering their education. Finally, one can also assume that literacy skills have brought changes to the daily activities of women, in a society where mastering reading, writing, and numeracy is more and more needed. In Ethiopia, as elsewhere, these everyday uses of literacy, which are less visible, need to be studied further by researchers.

3.2. School-educated women, the voices of women’s rights movements

Lastly, while as in most parts of the world the higher spheres of political positions are still male dominated, school-educated women are today very active in Ethiopian civil society. Non-governmental organisations such as:

Source 72. A Text book for Home Economics for Grade 9 (1971)

"This text book is intended for the use of grade nine pupils in the secondary schools. Its main purpose is to help the pupils to understand and appreciate home and family life and to develop the skills needed in the home. They will thus be prepared for the task of achieving a strong and effective family life. The text helps to develop in them an appreciation of good management—the economic use of time, energy, money, and material and human resources—as the means of obtaining maximum efficiency in home activities. The pupils are shown the importance of good nutrition to good health, and are made aware of the fact that the maintenance of good health is an important factor in a happy life. It is hoped to awaken the interest of pupils in the care of children and to develop their love for children. The text also enables the pupils to recognize the aesthetic, hygienic and economic value of clothing.

The text covers the seven areas of home economics that are included in the "Curriculum Guide." The areas are:

1. Human Relations
2. Food and Nutrition
3. Clothing and Tailoring
4. Child Care and Development
5. Housing and Home Improvement
6. Home Management and Consumer Education
7. Health and Sanitation"

Ministry of Education and Fine Arts, *Home Economics for Grade 9* (Addis Ababa: Division of Curriculum and Teaching Materials, 1971), 13.

the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association (EWLA), Progynist, Earuyan Solutions, or *Setaweet*, to mention only a few, are struggling hard to get women's rights respected and women's opportunities expanded. One also has to highlight the dedication of many women teachers who, through the girls' clubs established in the secondary schools throughout Ethiopia, are working daily with their female students to give them confidence and, again, get their rights respected. The same can be said about the dedication of ordinary nurses and health workers who, in towns and in the countryside, are trying to improve health and protect the physical integrity of Ethiopian women. All these women use their school-education to improve women's conditions.

Conclusion

School has a double aspect regarding gender. On the one hand, it reinforces gendered stereotypes and attitudes. On the other hand, it enables women to strengthen their position in society. Since the beginning of girls' education in Ethiopia, more and more girls have entered school and this trend is well confirmed today. It is therefore expected that girls will continue to use school-education to erode gendered inequalities and violence, and to bridge the gender gap. Nevertheless, such social transformation will not be the duty of



ልጃገረጾች፡ በመኪና፡ ጽሕፈት፡ ትምህርት፡ ላይ፡

Figure 26. Ministry of Information, ትምህርት በኢትዮጵያ (*Education in Ethiopia*)

women alone. Men and women should work together to make gender equality a reality. The educational system should be one of the social spaces to carry out this work.

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Part 8

Women and Sports

Chapter 17

The Long Road to Ethiopian Women's Participation in Athletics

“It was very shameful to wear shorts for sportswomen. As a result, most of us were attired in our long dresses for physical education classes, even in the inter-schools athletics competitions.”

Haile Senaite, interviewed by Tamirat Gebremariam (Gebremariam 2013, 115).

Nowadays, all the medals, victories and world records harvested by women athletes account for such a big part in Ethiopian athletics that nobody would ever think about contesting their contribution. Yet this social acceptance and recognition has not always been so obvious. The obstacles to their success were so high and so numerous that it took decades for Ethiopian women to collectively overcome them. For decades, Ethiopian women were kept away from sports fields, and even moreso from competitive events. This chapter explores the reasons why the conditions necessary for their success took so long to come together, to aggregate and thus enable them to collectively improve their sports level and to break through at the world level.

1. International contextualisation of the study

The obstacles faced by the Ethiopian women runners of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s were two-fold: on a broader scale, some hurdles are related to the norms that ruled the participation of any women in the world trying to get involved in sports at that time. For instance, in 1967, when Tsegie took part for the first time in an international competition, women—not only in Africa but also in Europe and the USA—were simply not allowed to run distances longer than 800 m. So before even mentioning any constraint at the Ethiopian level, let alone any improvement to their condition at this level, let us contextualise their participation in sports inside the broader picture of women's rights in sports at world level.

1.1. *The Olympics and the traditional patriarchal mentality in sports*

Since its outset, modern sport has been conceived as the preserve of men, when not a stronghold of manhood.

Facing patriarchal prejudices, women engaging in sports have been confronted, not only with the same sporting requirements as men but also by a series of additional gender-related barriers and obstacles including: claiming the right to compete; getting recognition and then support from sports officials at the local and national levels; gaining social acceptance to train full time and to compete abroad, that is to say, to lead, at least for some years, a life quite different from the traditional mother-spouse-housekeeper destiny. All these hurdles, that no man had ever had to face, had to be overcome, one by one. In Western Europe and North America, it took decades for the situation to evolve significantly. As an indirect consequence, the history of women in long-distance running appears, much more than men's history, as a cumulative and collective progression of small steps, involving and connecting women of several generations, countries and continents. The history of women in sport takes the shape of a timeline, while for men raising the topic of their acceptance in sports appears utterly incongruous.

Source 73. Statement of Pierre de Coubertin on women's participation to Olympiad (1912)

As early as 1912, Coubertin stated it clearly and bluntly when he had to oppose feminist claims demanding the opening of the Olympic Games to women: "An Olympiad with females would be impractical, uninteresting, unaesthetic and improper. (...) The true Olympic hero, in my view, is the adult male individual. (...) Their (women's) primary role should be to crown the winners."

Boulongne, Yves-Pierre, "Pierre de Coubertin and Women's Sport," *Olympic Review* 25, no. 131 (2000), 23–24.

1.2. *Women in distance running? "Not a very edifying spectacle"*

The running races of athletics have been at the core of this gender-related struggle since the earliest decades of the 20th century. For a long time, women were simply not allowed to compete in races longer than 100 m. When the situation evolved, it was only to give them the right to run over 200 m. In 1928, after harsh debates involving medical considerations and despite fierce opposition from senior International Olympic Committee (IOC) officials, an 800 m race was introduced to the Olympics. At that time, Soviet women were already racing almost double distance—1,500 m—and beating the 1913 world record held by a Finnish girl called Lempi Aaltonen. But the IOC officials had a distinctive sense of the position of women and they were shocked by the image of one contestant in this first Olympic 800 m race collapsing on the track

at the finishing line. Collapsing after any competitive race is rather common in athletics, but it was then considered as “Not a Very Edifying Spectacle” by the sports press.

As a consequence, the 800 m race was withdrawn from the Olympic programme in 1960 and from all other major competitions until another wave of feminine advances shook the old patriarchal prejudices of our societies.



Figure 27. Hitomi Kinue (left) and Lina Radke (right) run the 800 m at the 1928 Olympics in Amsterdam

Women's advances in society and running distances in athletics competitions are thus correlated, the former making progress possible in the latter, though in a rather indirect manner: new women's rights helped to change the image of women in society, which in turn allowed some progression of what was acceptable in terms of public demonstration of physical activity, partial nudity and expressions of effort, pain, and joy, involving social conceptions of both femininity and maternity. Because they were entering a men's sphere, women engaging in sports competitions were suspect—and

potentially revolutionary—on both issues. As a consequence, 800 m races were not reopened to women before 1954, access to the 1,500 m race was only acquired in 1969, racing over 3,000 m came in 1974 and the marathon in 1982, all of these advances being achieved in Western Europe and/or North America.

2. The Ethiopian context

2.1. *The traditional low-status, low-expectation social role of women in Ethiopia*

Traditional Ethiopian society expects women to be child-rearing, cooking, cleaning, and washing. These tasks are exclusively the responsibility of women, often performed without running water. Women in rural areas also play a key role in subsistence agriculture including care of domestic animals (sheep, goats and cows). Another problem for women is teenage pregnancy, usually going together with early marriage. In such conditions, engaging in sport has long been a very challenging decision, requiring not only a very strong personality, but also decisive support from at least the closest circle of relatives. An additional, more subtle problem is that girls have also been discouraged, indirectly, because of low expectations, especially in terms of professional careers. And competition has clearly been perceived as a men's preserve. In such a context, among the few girls who managed to engage in sport, even fewer went into competition. Finally, underrepresentation of women in sports can be attributed to the conflicting values of sexual beauty and sporting competence: beautiful women in Ethiopia are usually not expected to be thin, let alone skinny. So, women engaging in such an arduous path were commonly ostracised and needed to overcome a series of hurdles that no male athlete has ever faced.

One of the very first Ethiopian woman athletes, Tsigie Gebre Mesih, gives a good personal account of this situation, in the following chapter.

2.2. *Longer training for Ethiopian women to reach Olympic competition?*

In the men's category, Abebe Bikila started training properly only four years before winning his first Olympic gold medal. He was soon followed by several other male runners, as his sporting feats served as a source of inspiration and launched the construction of the Ethiopian culture of athletics, showing that it does not necessarily take long to "make a champion," nor to build a sports tradition at a national level. In the case of Ethiopian women athletes, the timespan between their first participation in an international competition (1967, Tsigie Gebre Mesih at the East African Championships in Kisumu, Kenya) and their first gold medal in the long-distance running event at a world-class competition (1992, Derartu Tulu in Barcelona Olympic Games)

stretches over 25 years. Why did it take decades for women to achieve what men did in a few years?

The main reason for this collective delay lies in the dual handicap, which characterises this population: they were women in a men's sector of activity (competitive sport), and they were women living in a traditional culture and society. Because the obstacles arising from this dual handicap involve mentalities and prejudices, which do not change radically overnight, it took several generations of active, bold and resilient female runners to reach the point where they just needed to train and compete as international athletes, and no longer needed to confront and overcome social resistance before training and competing like international athletes. This progress was not achieved before the early 1990s and the whole history of Ethiopian women athletics before this date is a long story of individual attempts to break a series of heavy constraints and to burst forth sporadically in some international competition before being going back to the harsh reality of their condition of standard Ethiopian women.

3. From physical education to the first professional female runners in Ethiopia

3.1. *The first forms of physical education for girls in Ethiopia*

The first Ethiopian girls to get involved in modern sporting activities were the pupils of *Ītege** Menen (or Mänän) school, a school established in 1931 and reserved for the girls of the nobility and the local economic elites. Like in the first boys' schools of the capital—the Mənəlik II School opened in 1908 and the Teferi Mekonnen School in 1925—most of the teachers were foreigners laying the foundations of a Western education in Ethiopia. In these schools, the young nobles of the capital, future leaders of the country, became familiar with forms of physical education which were modelled on the teaching in Europe. So they performed different types of physical activities. However, football games were restricted to boys, especially when the first matches opposed these young players and members of foreign communities in Addis Ababa: defending the honour of the host nation against the Armenians of the Ararat team, Greeks in Olympiacos, Italians in Juventus and Indians in the Indian Team was an utterly manly task.

Source 74. School physical activities during the years 1930–1935

Ladislav Farago describes these school physical activities during the years 1930–1935: “In the school, the gym display lasted an hour, they vaulted over parallel bars, did pull ups on the horizontal bar, performed physical exercises, played at tugs-of-war to finish off with a (...) football match.”

Farago, Ladislav, *Abyssinia on the Eve* (New York: G. P. Plunamis Press, 1935), 170.

3.2. *Italian sportswomen during the occupation*

During the Italian occupation, sports activities played an important part in the fascist doctrine, as physical activities were intended to shape and strengthen the new empire. In this context, the political institutions of the Italian regime were in charge of promoting all kinds of sports and fostering the participation of both men and women.

Source 75. Physical activities and Fascism

The function of physical activity was explicitly to “develop sport in its educational, agonistic and physical perfection functions, according to the racial postulate of the fascist doctrine.”

Gli Annali Dell' Africa Italiana 28, no. 1 (Mondadori, 1940).

But discrimination reigned and no Ethiopian was allowed to take part in the sports activities of the occupiers: they had to compete in their own activities, organised by a “Sports Office for the Indigenous.” Still, for the first time ever, Ethiopian populations were able to witness new sporting activities such as athletics, basketball, fencing, rock-climbing, boxing, cycling, motorcycling and car racing. Some other activities, already known in Ethiopia, such as wrestling, shooting and horse riding, were practised and organised by the Italians in very different ways to the traditional ones, in very specific environments and with strange attire. More surprising even, women were taking part in some of these activities, especially in fencing, horse riding, basketball and athletics.

Unfortunately, after the end of the Italian occupation, all modern sports, except football and boxing for men, disappeared from Ethiopia, with the notable exception of the School Sports Day, sponsored and attended by the Emperor. Seeing Italian women training and competing in diverse sport activities may have been inspirational for some Ethiopian women, but local society was still too traditional to value and foster feminine involvement in activities exposing their body publicly and distracting them from their conventional social roles.

3.3. *Pioneers as social rule breakers*

Overcoming the social prejudices related to femininity, maternity and the traditional roles and status of women in Ethiopian society has not been an easy game. The pioneers, presented in the following chapter, had to face strong opposition from their entourage, just to gain the right to start training. All of them had a strong personality. But this feature does not suffice and all of them also benefitted from some form of support from either their relatives or the political context in which they started daring to join in sports activities. Tsegie came from a wealthy urban background, submitting less to tradition and more open to Western influences. She grew up in Asmāra, a very Westernised

city—at that time—compared to the standards of the region. In addition to that, she received support from her father, a sportsman and a member of the armed forces.

Other pioneers had to face harsh prejudice, mainly because they were becoming competent enough to beat men and challenge their symbolic dominating position: as a reaction, their femininity was questioned through comments and nicknames like “tomboy” (Asselefesh Adera) or “the man in disguise” (Derartu Tulu). Asselefesh, who was the first Ethiopian women to run a marathon—in Neuchâtel 1989—also admitted to receiving the support of her father, who allowed her to go and play football in the streets of mid 1980s Addis Ababa. As the *Därg* regime was promoting gender equality, some female football teams emerged around that time, like the famous Etu Mela Michi team. But soon some coaches deterred Asselefesh from playing football under the pretext that it could “damage her femininity,” and oriented her towards athletics.

Conclusion

Despite all the prejudices of traditional society, some dauntless Ethiopian girls of the 1960s to the 1980s managed to occasionally find their way over these cultural hurdles. But for most of them, it was a one-shot isolated case, and none of them achieved any major sports feat with enough symbolic significance to open the field to a collective change in the condition of women athletes. Such a drive would only occur in the early 1990s, with the breakthrough of another pioneer, Derartu Tulu, who was not only brave on the tracks, but also in social life where she faced and overturned many prejudices, opening and clearing the way for her younger family members—Tirunesh Dibaba and her sisters—and beyond them, for many young Ethiopian women athletes.

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Chapter 18

Three Notable Ethiopian Female Athletes

“Today, we see how dominant Africans are, and I think she (Derartu Tulu) was the one that opened the door, she was the one who heightened the belief that African women can be world leaders.”

Elana Meyer, former South African runner, International Olympics Committee, in “Ethiopia’s Derartu Tulu” (*Legends Live On*, S3 - EP5, video, 25:38, International Olympic Committee).

Although Ethiopia has become famous in athletics particularly in long-distance running organised at regional and international levels, there is a dearth of literature on the topic. There is little on the history of sport in general and even less on women in this field. This chapter is dedicated to the short biographies of three notable Ethiopian female athletes: Tsigie Gebre Mesih, Derartu Tulu and Merima Denboba. Though still alive, they are not actively competing anymore. These athletes performed during the period of Emperor Ḥaylā Śəllase I, the *Därg* and the Ethiopian Peoples’ Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). They come from different parts of Ethiopia and have diverse socioeconomic and religious backgrounds, facts that allow the portrayal of the varieties of life experiences of Ethiopian women athletes. The study gives an insight into how women were perceived in society and into the changes and continuity in the gendered perspective of women’s involvement in sport.

Much information used for the biographies has been taken from interviews conducted with the three athletes by the researcher.

1. Tsigie Gebre Mesih

1.1. *Childhood in Addis Ababa*

Tsigie G/Mesih is one of the unsung living heroines. Daughter of *Ato* G/Mesih Betewelgne and *wäyzäro** Alasäbu Täsfa-Mariam, both Orthodox Christians, she was raised in a reasonably well-off family. She was born in 1957, in Asmära (Eritrea) and her father was a fervent supporter for the union of Eritrea with

Ethiopia and a member of the *Mahbär Fəqər Həgər* (“Association for the Love of Country”). As a result, Tsigie’s family moved to Addis Ababa and she grew up in *däggäc** Wube *säfär*.

Tsigie attended Kälämaworqe Elementary and Junior School and her secondary education was in Bāyānā Märid and the John F. Kennedy School. The foundation for her athletics career was her participation in the Ethiopian Schools Inter–Athletics Competitions of 1966. During school competitions, the participants wore sports shirts and shorts coloured green, yellow or red depending on their performance. The green shirts were for competent male athletes, the red ones for proficient female athletes and the yellow shirts for the less successful male or female athletes. However, due to Tsigie’s extraordinary results, she always wore a red shirt indicating her top achievement. One Amharic magazine found in her private collection affirmed her astonishing achievement:

Source 76. An amharic newspaper’s article on Tsigie G/Mesih

“The grade eleven student of John F. Kennedy, Tsigie G/Mesih, was selected as a superstar athlete of the year of the Ethiopian inter-school competition. In the competition she became the first in 100 m, 200 m, 400 m and relay running and she received three gold medals and one cup. Since she started to participate in the school competitions, she got twenty-seven gold and silver medals, a [wrist] hand watch and others...”

Amharic Newspaper found in Tsigie’s private collection. The newspaper article was cut out by her father.

In school competitions, Tsigie won more than forty medals and eight cups. In addition, she received a number of certificates and rewards from Emperor Hāylä Śəllase I.



Figure 28. When Tsigie received awards from Ato Yednāqachāw Tasämma



Figure 29. When Tsigid received awards from Emperor Haile Selassie, 1960s

1.2. Facing family opposition and criticism from society

Her family, especially her father, was very disappointed at her sports activities. Therefore, when she had competitions, she used to go home after waiting until her father had fallen asleep.

Later on, seeing her success, her father changed his mind and became her supporter. He even started to buy magazines which spoke about her athletics achievements.

Source 77. Interview of Tsigid G/Mesih

Tsigid said, ፋጭ ስጀምር እንዲሁም ስወዳደር ከቤተሰብና ከማህበረሰቡ ብዙ ተፅዕኖ ይደርስብኝ ነበር “When I started to take part in various athletics competitions there were a lot of challenges I faced, both from my family and from the society at large.”

Tsigid G/Mesih, interview by Tamirat Gebremariam, Debre Zeit, March 16, 2013.

The most problematic challenge to overcome at that time was wearing shorts and appearing in public areas (the stadium) for competitions. This was considered by society as breaching and violating cultural norms and religious canons. In 1970/71, in a meeting held at Täklä Haymanot *wäräda* in Addis Ababa, the administrator, *grazmač* Kebede Bayu, asserted that husbands should prevent their wives and daughters from wearing miniskirts.

Moreover, society thought and believed that if a woman participated in various sport activities, she might break her hymen because of hard physical activity whereas in traditional culture, an intact hymen at marriage was considered the proof of virginity. A female might also lose her femininity through sport and she might seem *wändawände* (“man-like”) in her behaviour. As a result, she might fail to please men and fail to secure a marriage proposal.

Source 78. Preventing women from wearing miniskirts (1963)

በተክለሐይማኖት ወረዳ የሚገኙ የዕድረ ዳኞችና ሽማግሌዎች ትናንት አንድ ስብሰባ አድርገው አጭር ቀሚስ መልበስ ስለሚቀርበት ሁኔታ ውይይጥ ማድረጋቸው ተገለጠ። በዚህም ስብሰባ ላይ የተከበሩ ቀኛዝማች ወ/አማኑኤል ሙላቴ የምዕራብ ክፍል ማዘጋጃ ቤት ረዳት ከንቲባና ግራዝማች ከበደ ባዩ የተክለሐይማኖት ወረዳ ገዢ ተገኝተዋል። በዚህ ዕለት በተደረገው ስብሰባ ረዳት ከንቲባው ባደረጉት ንግግር ሰውነትን የሚያራቁት አጭር ቀሚስ ለብሶ መታየት ፀያፍና የጨዋነትን ባህል በየሚያራክስ ከአገራችን ባህል ጋርም ያልተዛመደና ፈፅሞ የማይታወቅ መሆኑን ጠቅሰዋል።..... አንዳይላብሱ ብርቱ ምክር እንድትሰጧቸው ካሉ በኋላ.....ምክር የማጥቀስል ወይዘሮ የህግ እርምጃ የሚወስድባት መሆኑን በማስጠንቀቅ እንድታስረዱ ብለዋል።

Meeting held in 1963 E.C. at Täklä Häymanot *wärädä* in Addis Ababa to prevent women from wearing miniskirts (*Addis Zämän* no. 221, Mäskäräm, 1963 E.C.)

1.3. Professional training and career

Despite all these challenges, Tsigie became a member of the Ethiopian National Athletics Team in 1968 and a member of St. George Athletics Club. Her coach, *Ato* Sora Järso, was a lecturer at Addis Ababa University in the Department of Health and Physical Education. With three other female athletes, Sänayet Taddässä, Atsädä Taddässä and Almaz Ejäta, she began her training. From the late 1960s, she started participating in international athletics competitions in the East Africa Athletics Championships, held in Kenya, Zambia, Tanzania and Algeria in consecutive years. She became one of the first Ethiopian women to participate in the All-Africa Games and in the third All-Africa Games organised in Algiers (Algeria) in January 1978. In these competitions, Tsigie was awarded a bronze medal and a certificate. In the 1976 Montreal Olympic Games, for the first time, two Ethiopian female athletes were included in the Ethiopian Olympic Team. They were Tsigie G/Mesih, and Ethiopia G/Eyesus and they opened a new era for Ethiopian female athletes. Even though it was splendid progress in the history of Ethiopian female athletics, however, before the Games began, Ethiopia and other African countries decided to boycott the Montreal Olympics.

1.4. Becoming a coach

In the late 1970s, she ended her career as a runner and took coaching classes in Ethiopia and abroad. In 1979, she attended a six-month course at the *Institute of Deutsche Hochschule für Körperkultur* (DHFk) in the German Democratic Republic.

In 1980, she became a short distance coach for the Ethiopian National Athletics Team. With other colleagues, she also developed youth projects and provided training in athletics in Oromiya, Beni Šhangul, Tegray and other regions. As a coach, Tsigie, produced a number of elite athletes like Zäwdè Häilä-Mariam, Sänayet Häilè, Abaynäsh Aräga, Hiywote Sisaye, Wäru Baru, Alämayähu Gudäta, Wätärä Gääläčha and others.

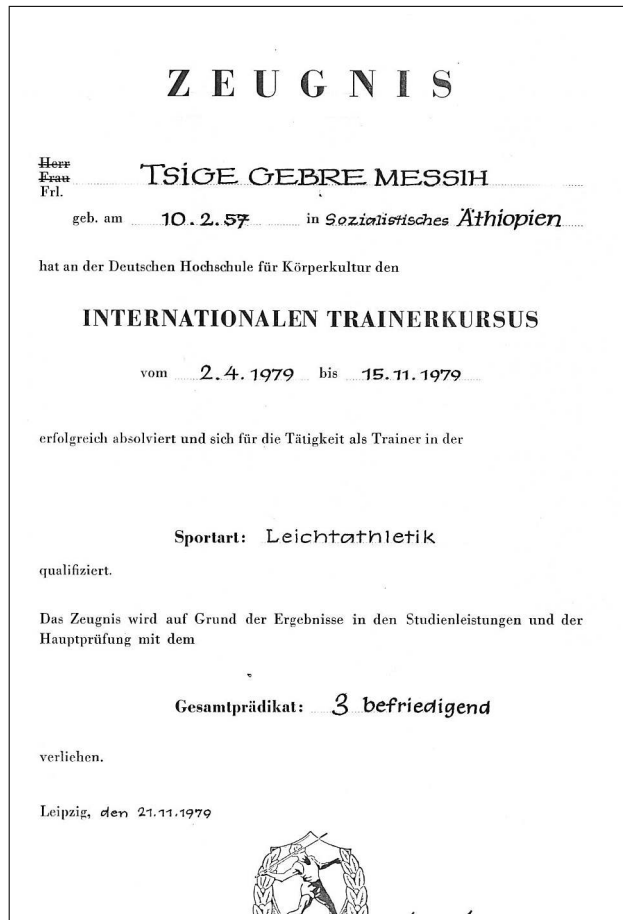


Figure 30. Diploma from Institute of Deutsche Hochschule für Körperkultur



Figure 31. Tsige G/Mesih, Diploma of “Women and Sport achievement” from IOC 2002

1.5. Life awards

For her achievement in athletics, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) awarded Tsige from Africa “The Women and Sport Achievement Diploma” prize on 26 April 2002 for her contributions to the promotion of women and girls in sport in Ethiopia. It was publicised in their *Press release* dated 26 April 2002.

2. Derartu Tulu

2.1. *From a child tending cattle to physical education*

Ethiopia was originally considered as a country of only male competitors in the world of athletics, seeing as Ethiopian men dominated long-distance running. Some also asked, “Can the Ethiopian womb bear a female star athlete?” The athlete Derartu Tulu is a clear testimony that shows the Ethiopian womb does bear female athletes.

Derartu Tulu is the daughter of Ato Tulu Gämäčhu and *wäyzäro** Yäshi Wägi, both Orthodox, and she was born on 21 March 1972 in Arsi-Bäqoji, into a large family of fourteen. She grew up in what was then a small agricultural village called Bäqoji, as a child tending cattle. Owing to her family’s economic problems, Derartu went to school two years later than the normal starting age. Moreover, like many young Ethiopian girls she had difficulty in reconciling her schoolwork with assisting her mother in the household chores. Therefore, she was always late for school, which was far from home. Derartu began running unintentionally, when she ran to school to avoid a latecomer’s punishment.

At an early age she rode horses, watched over cattle and ran with boys. She was unafraid, unlike the rest of the girls. At school, Sentayahu Eshetu, her physical education teacher, recognised her talent and encouraged her to enter a 400 metres race at the Bäqoji Elementary School. Though she was the only female racing, Derartu Tulu won the contest and beat all the boys, which boosted her confidence. Then people started referring to her as “The man in disguise.”

2.2. *From wärädä to national championships*

Once Derartu Tulu was recognised as the school champion, she was selected to run in the *wärädä* championships. She told the officials that she was sick at heart as her mother was not willing for her to enter any sporting activities. Indeed, her mother may have been influenced by an old pejorative Amharic saying “ሴት ከጣጀት ወንድ ከአደባባይ” “*The place for a woman is the kitchen whereas the place for the man is a public square.*”

But her friends and coach did not listen to her; rather they convinced her to race at the *wärädä* championship. Then, Derartu won the 800 metres and 1,500 metres races.

She was then selected by the Arsi region to compete in the Ethiopian National championships in Addis Ababa. There, she finished the race in third position in the 800 m and 1,500 m races and then she became a noticeable athlete who attracted the interest of a number of top Ethiopian clubs.

Source 79. Interview of Derartu Tulu in 2009

Derartu Tulu recalls how she was selected to participate in wäräda championships: “A military car came to pick me up. I had never been outside Bäqoji back then and stepped into a car. Since the military came to arrest criminals, the children in our area thought that I had stolen something. I was shocked until they finally told me that I was selected for the district to run. I told the officials that I had heart sickness and that my mother would kill me if I went. (...) My mother wanted me to focus on household tasks and also my mother was disgusted with me for running at the sport ground.”

Kayla Nolan, *More Than a Sport: Empowerment of Women through Running in Ethiopia* (Los Angeles: Occidental College, 2009), 20.

2.3. From Marämiya Sport Club to the Ethiopian national athletics team

When she was asked to join the Marämiya Sport Club, her mother did not support her, while conversely her father and sisters encouraged her to go for a second time to Addis Ababa.

Source 80. Interview of Derartu Tulu in 1989 EC (1997)

When Ato Abära Ayana first asked Derartu to join the Marämiya Sport Club in Addis Ababa, she replied: “I came to Addis Ababa for the championships without permission from my family so first I need to go back to Arsi to ask my family’s willingness and then I will return to Addis Ababa.” When Derartu returned to Bäqoji her mother was very upset and said: “How can you go away like a man?”

Unknown author, “interview of Derartu Tulu,” Addis Zämän, Genbot 26, 1989 E.C.

Moreover, her father sold a few sacks of barley to send Derartu to Addis Ababa. However, her beginnings as a member of the *Marämiya* Sport Club were not successful due to her feelings of loneliness caused by the separation from her family and birthplace. As a result, the officials of the club ordered her to leave, but with the help of her coach she succeeded in remaining in the club.

After one year, Derartu was recruited to the Ethiopian National Athletics Team. She went to Norway in 1981 to participate in the six-kilometre race but finished the contest in 23rd position. However, she continued her efforts and became the first black African woman to win a gold medal at the Olympics. In the 1992 Barcelona Olympic Games, she won the 10,000 m race. Subsequently, she became a medalist in many international championships.

Generally, Derartu said: “I reached this stage not easily but rather by overcoming many challenges, I grew up in a rural area of Ethiopia, so I faced a lot of challenges from society and from my family especially from my mother. (...) (but) I became successful with the help of God, my great effort and my

commitment to being a good athlete. This helped me to achieve good results and also helped me to convince my mother.”

Table 8. Derartu Tulu’s Major achievements in Athletics

Year	Venue	Country	Event	Time	Medal
1990	Plovdiv	Bulgaria	10,000 m	32:56.26	Gold
1991	Antwerp	Belgium	Long Race (6.425 km)	20:27	Silver
1992	Barcelona	Spain	10,000 m	3 1:06.02	Gold
1995	Durham	England	5 km	20:21 min	Gold
1995	Gothenburg	Sweden	10,000 m	31:08.10	Silver
1997	Turin	Italy	Senior woman race (6.6 km)	20:53 min	Gold
2000	Sydney	Australia	10,000 m	30:17.49	Gold
2000	Vilamoura	Portugal	Senior woman race (8.08 km)	25:42 min	Gold
2001	Edmonton and Alberta	Canada	10,000 m	31:48.81	Gold
2004	Athens	Greece	10,000 m	30:24.98	Bronze

Source: Derartu Tulu Profile, International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF). <https://worldathletics.org/athletes/ethiopia/derartu-tulu-14259709> [archive] (2013)]; “Derartu Tulu,” *Wikipedia*. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Derartu_Tulu.

3. Merima Denboba

Religion might have had a negative impact on female participation in physical education and sports competition because both the Muslim Holy Quran and the Christian Holy Bible order women to dress modestly without showing off their body. Islamic religious canons and dress rules prevented Muslim women from participating in sporting activities. Hashemi Faezeh, a member of the Islamic Republic’s High Council for Women’s Sports as well as Vice President of Iran’s Olympic Committee, appealed to the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to order new stadiums only for Muslim female contestants. So, her appeal makes clear that religious rules also had an impact on Muslim women’s participation in sports activities. In this part we will try to show the life of one prominent Ethiopian Muslim athlete, Merima Denboba.

3.1. *Growing up in Arsi in a supportive family and context*

Merima Denboba was born on 21 August 1974 in Arsi, to *Ato* Denboba Ogèto and *uäyzäro** Fatuma Gulebè. She is one of the leading Ethiopian Muslim athletes and may be considered a groundbreaking athlete for her fellow Ethiopian female Muslim athletes.

Besides cultural and religious factors, the prevalence of ineffective physical education teachers was a factor in the low level of female student participation. They neither encouraged nor forced female students to engage or take part in physical exercise and training.

Source 81. Interview of Merima Denboba in 2013 (extract 1)

With regard to student participation in Physical Education when she was at school, she said: “Since I grew up in a rural part of Ethiopia as most rural women I and my friends faced cultural norms. As a result female student participation in physical education was too low during my stay at school. If a girl went on the sport field, she was considered by society as rowdy or untamed.”

Merima Denboba, interview by Tamirat Gebremariam, Addis Ababa, April 25, 2013.

However, when Merima began athletics, she did not meet opposition from her family. Rather, they encouraged her to move forward in athletics. Regarding the challenges she faced due to her religion when she began athletics, she said: “At that time Ethiopian Muslims were not too strict on wearing *hijab* (“head cover”) or *khimar* (to cover their cleavage or bosoms) and a woman did not have to cover from head to toe. It is a recent phenomenon so I did not face any opposition due to my religion.”

Source 82. Interview of Merima Denboba in 2013 (extract 2)

“Most of my challenges came from the surrounding community; they considered me as a morally bankrupt or spiteful woman. As a result they separated their daughters from me because they presumed that I would make their daughters misbehave. As a result they made me feel lonely. Beside this they insulted me with bad words when I went to the sport fields የትም ስትዞር ዲቃላ ይዛ ትመጣለች (She may bear an illegitimate child, a bastard).”

Merima Denboba, interview by Tamirat Gebremariam, Addis Ababa, April 25, 2013.

3.2. *A model for Ethiopian Muslim women athletes*

By overcoming discrimination, Merima, became a new role model for young Ethiopian women athletes in general, and female Muslim athletes, in particular. In both domestic and international competitions, Merima Denboba won many medals and cups. In domestic competitions, from 1988 to 2005, she got thirty-five gold, eighteen silver and seventeen bronze medals. In international competitions, from 1991 to 2008, Merima won fifty gold, thirty silver and twenty bronze medals. Furthermore, from 1991 to 2008 she obtained sixty-three gold, thirty-five silver and twenty-two bronze cups. Currently, Merima works as athletics team leader for the Ethiopian Bank Sports Club, her former athletics club.

Table 9. Merima's major achievements in athletics

Year	Venue	Country	Event	Time	Medal
1993	Tokyo	Japan	International Marathon Relay	4:19:12	Gold
1994	Valencia	Spain	Half Marathon	1: 11:43	Gold
1995	Budapest	Hungary	5,000 m	15:47:03	Gold
1996	Sotteville	France	3,000 m	9:00:05	Silver
1997	Donna Sprint. Trento	Italy	5,000 m	15:11:71	Gold
1998	Athens	Greece	5,000 m	15:30:06	Gold
1999	Belfast	Northern Ireland	8 km	28:12	Silver
2000	Ala del Sardi	Italy	5 km	17:11:09	Gold
2001	Yecal	Spain	6 km	17:57:00	Gold
2002	Lisbon	Portugal	5,000 m	15:17:24	Gold
2003	Spanish Champion	Spain	10,000 m	31:47:53	Gold
2004	International De-Italia	Spain	6 km	21:42:71	Gold

Source: Merima Denboba Private Record, her results collected by her coach.

Conclusion

The above biographies give a useful concrete and specific view of the cultural challenges and problems which have inhibited girls considering a career in athletics from the 1950s to the 21st century. Their common challenge was the traditional gender role reserved for females in society.

Families, except Merima's, strongly objected to their daughters being involved in physical education and sports and appearing in public in competitions dressed in shorts. Interestingly, in the case of Derartu, it was her mother, who perpetuated this conservative role. Neighbours' attitudes also had a role in prohibiting girls from entering into physical activities. Except for Tsigie, poverty was also another challenge to overcome. Traditional religious views about women were another hindrance to female athletes. However, we note that Merima grew up in a period of tolerant, liberal Islam in Arsi. She did not experience so many religious prejudices stating that *hijab* and *qhimar* in sports are "recent phenomena."

These pioneering women athletes all became role models in encouraging other girls to follow in their footsteps, while some of them became coaches, helping to produce more successful female athletes.

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Part 9

Women, Sexuality
and Reproductive Health

Marie-Laure Derat
Rahwa M. Weldemichael

Chapter 19

Women and Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting

“Because women and girls are not valued equally as human beings, they are treated as less than such. Female genital mutilation is one example of this that has to be stopped.”

Waris Dirie, UN special ambassador against female genital mutilation, in United Nations, “United Nations Population Fund ambassador named woman of the year” (press release no. POP/689, November 12, 1998).

The issue of Female Genital Mutilation or Cutting (FGM/C) is of considerable importance in Ethiopia. It is generally regarded as a “social custom that has been practiced for centuries,” but there are no comprehensive historical studies on the subject that cover the period from the past to the present. This chapter shows that it is difficult to trace the history of the issue since medieval times because of the gaps in the studies. Therefore, while the first and second parts of the chapter will provide an overview of the few historical studies that have been conducted on the medieval and modern periods, the third and fourth parts, devoted to the 20th century and beyond, will examine issues and trends due to the lack of historical research in comparison to the availability of more recent surveys and studies on FGM/C in contemporary Ethiopia.

The oldest written sources found on the topic confirm that it was practiced in Ethiopia as early as the Middle Ages. However, it took centuries for the government seconded by the African Union to demonstrate its commitment to bring FGM/C to an end through legislation, campaigns and concerted actions by government, international organisations and civil society. There is also evidence to show a link between child marriage and female circumcision, and both practices remain prevalent in sub-Saharan Africa, although they have declined. However, these issues and their links are not addressed in this chapter because they have not been approached in any historical research. Nevertheless, the case of contemporary Ethiopia can be seen as a success and

lessons can be learnt from the policies put in place in order to reduce these practices. However, there has been a resurgence of these practices in some regions of Ethiopia in recent years. This historical overview shows how strong the traditions are and how debates on the issue have been on the political stage for centuries.

Source 83. Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C)

The term “female genital mutilation” (also called “female genital cutting” and “female genital mutilation/cutting”) refers to all procedures involving partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons.

WHO, *Eliminating Female Genital Mutilation. An Interagency Statement* (Geneva: World Health Organization, 2008).

Female genital mutilation or female genital cutting (FGM/C) is the terminology most generally used in international debates, and has been adopted by the UN and the Government of Ethiopia in its policy statements and laws.

In this chapter: we prefer to use the term “circumcision,” as we do not wish to stigmatise girls who have undergone the practice or hamper constructive dialogue within communities. In the Ethiopian context, the practice varies from clitoridectomy and/or excision to the more severe and risky form of infibulation practiced by the eastern pastoralist groups. The age of girls also varies, with the practice carried out shortly after birth in northern Ethiopia while in the south it is usually a precursor to marriage and among some southern groups was a collective rite of passage involving public celebration. (Young Lives, “Child Marriage and Female Circumcision (FGM/C): Evidence from Ethiopia,” *Policy Brief* 21, 2014.)

We also use the term “circumcision” in the chapter because the Ethiopian Church was using it in the Middle Ages to describe the practice as the feminine version of masculine circumcision.

1. The historical background of excision and debates in medieval Ethiopia in relation to circumcision

In the historiography, the circumcision of young boys in the Christian communities has long been understood as a Judaic custom, that underlies the Jewish roots of Ethiopian Christianity. From the 17th century onwards, circumcision and excision have been linked in literature and considered two sides of the same coin. This view is the result of a long process that we can trace from the 15th century in the Christian kingdom of Ethiopia. At that time, the Christian king introduced a reform aimed at Christianising female mutilation, making it the female counterpart of circumcision. Thanks to the texts that document this moment, we can also identify excision practices within Muslim and “local religious” communities in the 15th century.

1.1. *The Christianisation of the FGM/C ritual during the reign of King Zär'ä Ya'eqob (1434–1468)*

At the end of the 15th century, King Zär'ä Ya'eqob, who was trying to reform Christianity, was faced with the question of female excision and circumcision. The debate is recorded in the *Mäshäfä Bərhan* or “the book of light,” which was written on his order to be read every Saturday and Sunday. The study here focuses on the homily dedicated for the second Sunday of each month that is related to the position of women within the liturgy, taking into account their menstruation and the separation of men and women during Mass. The issue of female circumcision is also seen as a practice to be abolished. At the beginning, when he heard that the Christian Tigrean people practiced female circumcision, King Zär'ä Ya'eqob condemned the practice stating that it was a Muslim and a “pagan” custom of the people living in the eastern and western parts of the country.

Source 84. The proclamation of King Zar'a Ya'eqob on Christian female genital circumcision (15th century)

After having described the practice of the female excision, almost similar to an infibulation, King Zär'ä Ya'eqob states: “The people of Tigre are, however, all following the Orthodox faith; they practiced it by ignorance, because the priests did not teach them to abandon (it): I proclaim, I, King Zar'a Ya'eqob, bearing the regnal name of Constantine, that no one perform from now on this stupid behaviour in all the countries of my kingdom. Therefore, our father, the patriarch, and our fathers, the metropolitans, forbade under excommunication to practice it on the genital organ of the woman: at the time of circumcision, the “flesh should not be cut with a blade and the genital organ should not be in contact with blood. We do not circumcise her as prescribed. At the time of her wedding, her husband does not open the seal of the woman's virginity with his finger and does not open the genital organ of the lady with a blade, as God created her. The seal of the girl will be opened with the genital organ of the man married to her and the blade does not penetrate in her genital organ, except the day of her circumcision, as prescribed to Abraham.”

Carlo Conti Rossini and Lanfranco Ricci, *Il libro della luce del negus Zar'a Ya'eqob (Mashafa Berhan)* (Louvain: CSCO [Script. Aeth.], 1964–1965), vol. 1, 91.

However, instead of fighting and eradicating it, the king found a way to Christianise the ritual. By looking forward and compiling various canonic texts of the Orthodox religion, the king succeeded in demonstrating that genital mutilation was an Orthodox ritual that has no gender, implying the idea that all Christians, male or female, had to be “circumcised.” If the debate implies that before his reign only the Tigreans practiced women's excision, we can hypothesise that King Zär'ä Ya'eqob could have been the instigator for the generalisation of the practice of Christian female genital mutilation.

1.2. FGM/C and the question of Judaic influence in Ethiopian Christianity:

A debate that started during the 16th century

At the beginning of the 16th century, the Portuguese Alvares noted that circumcision of both men and women was practised on a religious basis, a fact that could confirm that the reform of King Zār'ä Ya'eqob had worked. However, he also mentions the fact that there was no specific ceremony.

Source 85. Remarks of Francisco Alvares on male and female circumcision during the 16th century

"Circumcision is done by anybody without any ceremony, only they say that so they find it written in the books, that God commanded circumcision. And let not the reader of this be amazed—they also circumcise the females as well as the males, which was not in the old laws."

Francisco Alvares, in Charles F. Beckingham and Georges W. B. Huntingford, *The Prester John of the Indies: A True Relation of the Lands of the Prester John, Being the Narrative of the Portuguese Embassy to Ethiopia in 1520* (Cambridge: Hakluyt Society, 1961), 109.

From the 16th century, with the arrival of the Jesuits in the country, the question of Jewish influences in the Ethiopian Orthodox faith increased. Faced with accusations of the Jesuits, in 1555, King Gälawdewos adopted a different position when addressing his opponents who saw circumcision as being a Judaic practice. He justified the ritual as a traditional ancestral rite that had nothing to do with religion.

Source 86. King Gälawdewos' (1540-1563) proclamation on circumcision

"And as to the institution of circumcision, it is not that we are circumcised like the Jews, for we know the word of the teaching of Paul, fount of wisdom (...). We possess all the books of Paul's teaching and they instruct us as regards circumcision and as regards the prepuce. But the circumcision which we have is according to the custom of the country—like the scarification of the face (practised) in Ethiopia and Nubia (...). What we do is not for the observance of the laws of the Pentateuch but rather in accord with the custom of the people."

Edward Ullendorff, "The 'Confessio Fidei' of King Claudius of Ethiopia," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 32, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 173.

This debate continued in Ethiopian historiography until the 20th century, with two different camps opposing each other: the thesis of Jewish influences inherited from Egypt or Yemen and the thesis of a late interpretation of old canons during the 15th century, which justified the practice of an archaic Christianity.

2. The practices of FGM/C in modern times (17th–19th centuries)

For Manoel d’Almeida, all the inhabitants of the country were circumcised: “Jews, Moors, Christians and heathens.” James Bruce returned to the subject at the end of the 18th century. It seemed to him that the origin of “circumcision” went back to the people of *Agaazis* who brought the custom with them when they settled on the Tigrean Plateau. However, although it was an ancient practice, he also tried to show that it probably did not come from Egypt by locating the people who did not practise it.

2.1. *Communities that practised excision (or not) at the end of the 18th century*

According to James Bruce, the Falaša practised female excision, although not all Ethiopian communities had adopted it. For example, the Agāw communities living between Lasta and Bāgemdār and those of Damot were not circumcised, nor were the Gafat people. He states that the Amhara were also not circumcised before the 10th century. He also claims that the Oromo people did not practise circumcision. The last groups listed are the lowland populations living to the west or southwest of the Ethiopian highlands, who were regularly the victims of slave raids and whom Bruce refers to using the pejorative term “Shankallas” which was then in use in the Christian kingdom. The location of these communities, which did not practise feminine circumcision, helped the author to establish that the custom did not come from Egypt.

Source 87. The origin of circumcision in Ethiopia according to James Bruce

“The Abyssinians of Tigre say that they received it from Ishmael’s family and his descendants, with whom they were early connected in their trading voyages. They say also, that the Queen of Sheba, and all the women of that coast, had suffered excision at the usual time of life, before puberty, and before her journey to Jerusalem. The Falasha again declare, that their circumcision was that commonly practiced at Jerusalem in the time of Solomon, and in use among them when they left Palestine, and came into Abyssinia.”

James Bruce, *Travels to Discover the Sources of the Nile, in the Years 1768, 1769, 1770, 1771, 1772 & 1773* (Dublin: William Sleater, 1790), vol. 5, 26.

2.2. *How FGM/C was performed in medieval and postmedieval Ethiopia (16th–19th centuries)*

At the end of the 15th century, according to King Zār’ā Ya’eqob, the Muslims and the “Pagans” who practised excision used the same methods. They performed the circumcision of young girls by cutting the genital organ (*harafa*) with a razor, leaving the blood to cover it, without even leaving a hole sufficient for urination. It was therefore a full ablation of the labia with total cauterisation

(Type IV). During their future marriage, the husband had to open the hymen of his wife with his fingers, making it look like the practice of infibulation.

In the Christian communities, even after Zär'ä Ya'eqob's proclamation, it was still a ritual that was not performed in a church or by a member of the clergy. In the 17th century, Job Ludolf, a German orientalist, states that the circumciser was a woman, and that the operation was performed on the eighth day after birth. At the beginning of 19th century, the missionary Samuel Gobat stated that the very same practice was still in use. F. Caillaud, a French naturalist who travelled to Ethiopia in the 19th century, also describes that what was prescribed in Zär'ä Ya'eqob's homily was almost similar to his own observations in Sennar. In the early 20th century, Enno Littmann, a German orientalist of the beginning of the 20th century, notes that in Təgre, the operation was performed between the ages of one and six years and that the excision of girls was a woman's duty.

3. The practices of FMG/C in 21st century Ethiopia

The few historical studies on this topic have been presented in the first and second parts of this chapter. This reinforces the fact that there is a general lack of historical research on the challenges faced by women in the contemporary period. This conclusion also applies to any health and medical research topic. The analysis of FGM/C in contemporary Ethiopia has only been approached through anthropological, sociological and development studies, making historical analysis difficult. Moreover, as historical studies are not complete in terms of chronological and geographical data, a comparison with the current situation is not possible. Therefore, the third and fourth parts of the chapter, rather than being a historical research, will present the situation of FGM/C practices in Ethiopia today, its impacts on women's lives, and the attempts of the government since 1979 to implement a legal framework to end the practice.

3.1. Overview of the practice of FGM/C in 21st century Ethiopia

According to the Ethiopian Demographic Health Surveys, the prevalence of FGM/C in Ethiopia decreased from 80% in the 2000s, to 74% in 2005 and to 65% in 2016. The highest concentration of female circumcisions occurs in Somali (99%) and Təgre has the lowest prevalence (24%), followed by Gambella (33%). According to the 2013 UNICEF statistical overview report, FGM/C affected 23.8 million women and girls in Ethiopia.

Estimates by focus-group discussants in 1997 in EGLDAM 2008 show that infibulation is the most prevalent among the Somalis and Afars. Excision and clitoridectomy are practiced among the Amhara, with lower prevalence among the Tigreans and to a certain degree in the Southern Nation and Nationalities (SNNP). According to Boyden et al. (2013), clitoridectomy is

commonly practised among the Oromo. The age at which FGM/C is carried out varies across different ethnic groups. Female circumcision is done shortly after birth in northern parts of the country whereas it is associated with marriage in the southern part.

Table 10. Classification of FGM/C

FMG/C TYPES	Definition
Type I	Partial or total removal of the clitoris and/or the prepuce (clitoridectomy).
Type II	Partial or total removal of the clitoris and the <i>labia minora</i> , with or without excision of the <i>labia majora</i> (excision).
Type III	Narrowing of the vaginal orifice with creation of a covering seal by cutting and appositioning the <i>labia minora</i> and/or the <i>labia majora</i> , with or without excision of the clitoris (infibulation).
Type IV	All other harmful procedures to the female genitalia for non-medical purposes, for example, pricking, piercing, incising, scraping and cauterisation.

Source: World Health Organization (2008, 24).

3.2. The practitioners

According to UNICEF 2005, FGM/C is mainly carried out by traditional practitioners, which include local specialists, traditional birth attendants and older members of a community, particularly women. Pankhurst (2003) indicated that in the southern part of the country, female circumcision is performed by a caste group of specialist craft workers such as potters, smiths and tanners. The registered charity 28 Too Many 2013 country profile further showed that there is an indication of FGM/C being performed by health workers within a hospital/clinic setting, mainly in urban areas, which shows a trend towards the medicalisation of the practice in the country. Though medicalization decreases health risks associated with the procedure, it could result in misunderstandings surrounding the practice.

4. The current discourse for the perpetuation of the practice

In the focus groups EGLDAM conducted as part of the follow-up survey in 2007, as cited in 28 Too Many (2013), found the following reasons for performing FGM/C across different ethnic groups in Ethiopia. FGM/C is practised to suppress girls' sexuality among the Oromo, Amhara, Tigreans, Kulo/Dawro and other ethnic groups, to avoid difficult childbirth among the Amharas, for an easy penetration for males among Tigreans, to avoid being stigmatised among Oromo, Kebena and Kem ethnic groups, to prevent rape amongst the Afar and the Somali, for hygienic reasons by the Jebelawi and

Oromo and for aesthetic reasons among the Afar. As indicated in the country profile of 28 Too Many (2013), though FGM is not endorsed by religions in Ethiopia, some consider it a religious act. In general, FGM/C is a reflection of gender inequality and represents social norm tradition and is an expression of discrimination against women.

Source 88. Interview of an old woman in Təgre towards circumcision

A grandmother of one of the Young Lives girls in Təgre, who had been married at the age of 19, expressed her cultural dilemma regarding circumcision as follows: “On the one hand, when I see some girls going around with boys, I think that it would be better to circumcise my granddaughter because then she would be calmer and wouldn’t be seen with boys all the time. So, you can think even if circumcision has bad consequences, it is preferable. If a girl has an unwanted pregnancy, if she gives birth from an outsider, what can be done then? On the other hand, you also see girls who have been circumcised but are not disciplined. So, maybe it depends on the nature of the girls. Personally, my experience was very bad, so I think it has to be condemned.”

Young Lives, “Child Marriage and Female Circumcision (FGM/C): Evidence from Ethiopia,” *Policy Brief* 21 (revised December 2014), 5.

4.1. *The medical and psychological impact of FGM/C on women*

FGM/C has no health benefits, but rather it has negative physical and mental health consequences. The WHO 2016 (p. 6–7) guidelines on the management of health complications from female genital mutilation specified the immediate, obstetric, sexual, psychological and long-term risks linked with FGM/C. Accordingly, the immediate risks include haemorrhage, pain, shock, genital tissue swelling, infections, urination and wound healing problems and death. Obstetric risks include caesarean section, postpartum haemorrhage, episiotomy, prolonged labour, obstetric tears/lacerations, instrumental delivery, difficult labour/dystocia, extended maternal hospital stay, stillbirth and early neonatal death and infant resuscitation at delivery. Sexual functioning risks include dyspareunia (pain during sexual intercourse), decreased sexual satisfaction, reduced sexual desire and arousal, decreased lubrication during sexual intercourse and reduced frequency of orgasm or anorgasmia. Psychological risks include post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety disorder and depression. Long-term risks associated with FGM/C include genital tissue damage, vaginal discharge, vaginal itching, menstrual problems, reproductive tract infections, chronic genital infections, urinary tract infections and painful urination.

5. The tools to fight FGM/C and move towards changes

5.1. Type of actions to end FGM/C

"The most successful community-based initiatives take human rights as the basis for action and incorporate the key elements for change." (UNICEF, 2005: 23). According to UNICEF 2005, a number of community-based actions have been adopted to protect girls from FGM/C. The most successful community-based initiatives adopt human rights approaches and are participatory in nature and engage communities to define problems and come up with solutions by themselves through facilitating non-judgmental discussion/dialogue, creating awareness on the negative consequences of the practice, empowering groups to organise and undertake collective action and make public affirmation and diffuse the decision to other communities. Where the practice of FGM/C is linked to initiation, efforts have been made towards developing alternative rites of passage and creating alternative employment opportunities for traditional excisers. Other initiatives stipulated by WHO in 2008 include empowering girls and women through education and economic empowerment; enhancing the inclusion of boys; promoting culturally-sensitive education on FGM/C; addressing the health complications of FGM/C; conducting activities that promote public discussion and debate on FGM/C; taking legal measures in consultation with community and accompanied by information.

5.2. History of the government effort against FGM/C

Ethiopia has taken a number of measures against FGM/C and is a signatory to international human rights conventions, which serve as a basis for the representation of FGM/C as a violation of international human rights. As indicated by Boyden et al. (2013: 20), these include the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, the 1998 organisation of African Unity Addis Ababa Declaration on Violence Against Women and the 2008 United Nations Interagency Statement on Elimination of FGM.

According to the organization 28 Too Many (2013), at a national level, since its inception in 1987, the National Committee on Traditional Practices of Ethiopia (NCTPE) has been creating awareness on the topic. The Ethiopian government has integrated anti Harmful Traditional Practices (HTPs) into all the major policy and legal plans. The first step in Ethiopia was therefore to confirm in the 1995 Constitution the human and citizenship rights for women. In 2000, the Family Law confirmed women's rights and their equality with men. However, at that time, the banning of FGM/C was not clearly enshrined. FGM/C was criminalised in 2005 in Ethiopia and some communities have passed by-laws outlawing FGM/C. A National FGM Network was founded in 2002 and was officially launched in 2010. In 2013, FDRE Ministry of

Women, Children and Youth developed a “National Strategy and Action Plan on Harmful Traditional Practices against Women and Children in Ethiopia.” The strategy stipulated three strategic pillars that specifically focus on prevention, protection and provision with the aim of ending child marriage and FGM/C. The ministry recently developed a National Costed Roadmap to End Child Marriage and FGM/C through a combination of strategies that enhance empowerment of girls and their families and engagement of communities and strengthen systems and enabling environments and promote production of data and evidence.

Many governmental and non-governmental organisations, activists and the media have been conducting campaigns against FGM/C. Though the campaigns have been effective in raising awareness of communities, FGM/C is still prevalent in Ethiopia. According to 28 Too Many (2013), the challenges to end FGM/C is the changing patterns of FGM/C for example, from Type III infibulation to Sunna in Afar and Somali regions without change of social norms and eradicating the practice. According to Boyden et al. (2013), changing the timing of ceremonies associated with FGM/C and boys’ circumcision ceremonies were used as concealment to circumcise girls in Oromia and Hawassa, respectively. The lack of evidence and girls’ fear of stigmatisation by their communities for disclosing circumcision make it challenging to implement the law.

Conclusion

FGM/C was officially banned in the Family Law which was adopted in 2005. But the application of this new legislative framework started later on, and the effort has not been replicated in the same way in all the regions. The government committed itself to achieving the national target to eliminate child marriage and FGM/C by 2025. With national and international mobilisation and support, FGM/C has significantly decreased over the past few years: the prevalence of FGM/C in 2016 stood at 65 percent, compared to 74 percent in 2005. However, FGM/C prevalence data reveal variation between regions and within the regions. The Ethiopian case offers an interesting focus for a comparative prospect regarding the achievements of the different tools currently adopted by activists and official authorities in order to bring this practice to an end, such as increasing access to health care, education and employment opportunities for girls. As stated in Young Lives Policy Brief 21 (2014), resistance to abandoning the practice still exists due to communities’ belief in the importance and perpetuation of the practice and lack of options and opportunities for girls in forms of training, employment, education and social protection. Therefore, banning the practice may not bring the intended result, but rather may encourage underground practices and the key to ending the practice lies in engaging communities and girls themselves as well as all relevant stakeholders. We wonder if exhaustive historical studies

of FGM/C could bring new data about the alleged reasons, methods and trends related to the practice and therefore shed light on some possible solutions to bring it to an end.

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Chapter 20

Women and Reproductive Health in Contemporary Ethiopia

“If there is one message that echoes forth from this conference, let it be that human rights are women’s rights and women’s rights are human rights, once and for all!”

Hillary Rodham Clinton, “Video Recording of First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton Speaking at the United Nations Fourth Womens’ Conference in Beijing, China,” September 5, 1995, from *Clinton Digital Library*, Collection WJC-FL, Series Melanne Vermeer’s Subject Files, *video*.

No systematic study has been undertaken on the history of women and reproductive health in Ethiopia. Richard Pankhurst dedicated some articles to the history of diseases and traditional medicines. The introduction of some European traditions of medicine and medical practices in Ethiopia dates to the reign of Emperor Ləbnä Dəngəl (1508–1540), and they were introduced by missionaries, travellers, and members of diplomatic missions. Mənilək II (1889–1913) and Ḥaylā Səllase (1930–1974) facilitated the promotion of some European traditions of medicine (Pankhurst, 1965).

On the contrary, many studies emerged on the topic in the last two decades, mainly focusing on women’s challenges to access affordable, quality, and equitable reproductive health services and the government’s efforts to address the problem. This chapter provides an account of the evolution of national health policies and strategies in contemporary Ethiopia, followed by descriptions of the situations of maternal health, abortion, syphilis, HIV/AIDS, child marriage, and family planning and their implications on the lived experiences of women.

1. The evolution of national health policies and strategies

The first national policy and strategy for health was formulated in 1963, aiming to reach rural areas by expanding a decentralised basic health services network and integrating preventive and curative services (Kloos 1998). Since

its founding in 1948, the Ministry of Public Health trained primary healthcare personnel in various aspects of healthcare services during the 1950s. The Ethiopian Red Cross Society established the first national nursing school in 1949 (Stommès and Sisaye 1980). However, this and subsequent plans failed to bring health equity between rural and urban areas. To address this gap, the Mengistu Haile Mariam (*Därg*) regime (1974–1991), rooted in the 1978 Alma Ata declaration, emphasised the importance of primary healthcare.

The 10 years Perspective Health Plan from 1984/1985 to 1993/1994 focused on expanding and strengthening maternal and child health services, with community health agents and traditional birth attendants running community health services and advocating for essential health services at affordable cost. Although the *Därg* regime implemented various community programs and expanded the rural health service, it failed to revolutionise health services. Out of the slightly more than 5,000 trained community health agents and traditional birth attendants who were trained by 1984, only 30% continued their services in 1984 due to lack of remuneration, refresher courses, and supervision (Kloos 1998).

Following the *Därg* regime, Ethiopia enacted a series of Health Sector Development Programs (HSDP I, II, III and IV) from 1997 to 2015 and Health Sector Transformation Plans from 2015 to 2025. The government of Ethiopia launched “the Health Extension Program (HEP)” in 2003 under HSDP II with a philosophy that “if the right health knowledge and skill is transferred, households can take responsibility for producing and maintaining their own health” (MOH 2010, 14). At the heart of HEP have been health extension workers who had been trained by local government and deployed in pairs at health posts in local communities. There has been improvement during this period in terms of family planning services, for example, contraceptive coverage increased from the 1996/97 level of 4% to 25% in 2004/05. Building upon the successes and challenges of the successive Health Sector Development Programs (HSDPs) implemented over the last years, the government launched the five years Health Sector Transformation Plan (HSTP), which is part of the country’s GTP-II and the first phase of a 20-year health sector strategy titled ‘Envisioning Ethiopia’s Path to Universal Health Care through Strengthening of Primary Health Care.’

Ethiopia implemented the first Health Sector Transformation Plan (HSTP-I) from 2015/16 to 2019/20, which improved access to and utilisation of health services, reduced maternal mortality, and increased skilled birth delivery. However, there are significant challenges in addressing the unmet need for contraception, reducing maternal mortality, and disparities in service utilisation among people with different socioeconomic statuses. The second Health Sector Transformation Plan (HSTP II) covers the period from 2020/21—24/25 with a focus on top priority areas, including quality and equity of health

services, development of health workforce, information revolution, and health financing and leadership (MOH 2021).

Ethiopia's health policy is influenced by global health conventions, declarations, and global reproductive health discourses. Ethiopia is a signatory to international conventions/charters and declarations, including those arising from the 1987 Safe Motherhood Conference in Nairobi; the 1990 World Summit for Children; the 1994 ICPD; the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (MOH 2011, 17).

2. The burden on women in reproductive health

Source 89. Reproductive health

Reproductive health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, in all matters relating to the reproductive systems and to its functions and processes. Reproductive health therefore implies that people are able to have a satisfying and safe sex life and that they have the capability to reproduce and the freedom to decide if, when and how often to do so. (...) Reproductive rights embrace certain human rights that are already recognized in national laws, international human rights documents and other consensus documents. These rights rest on the recognition of the basic right of all couples and individuals to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing and timing of their children and to have the information and means to do so, and the right to attain the highest standard of sexual and reproductive health. It also includes their right to make decisions concerning reproduction free of discrimination, coercion and violence, as expressed in the human rights document.

United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), *Program of Action. Adopted at the International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo, 5–13 September 1994* (New York, 2004), 45–46.

2.1. Maternal mortality

Though few studies have been undertaken in the past, scrutinising Ethiopian hagiographies, Steven Kaplan (1986) noticed that medieval women faced health issues related to pregnancy, miscarriage, and death at delivery or soon after delivery. He emphasised the importance given to the problem of women's barrenness; a topic as well studied with more detail by Mersha Alehegne (2015) while uncovering the childhood of the saints.

Maternal mortality as a global health issue has only gained increased recognition over the past two decades and become part of international discourse on reproductive health and human right (see for example, the 1990 World Summit for Children, the 1994 ICPD; the 1995 World Conference on Women; the Fifth United Nations (UN) Millennium Development Goal (MDG); Tessama et al. (2017) study on trends and causes of maternal mortality in Ethiopia during 1990–2013).

Source 90. Maternal death

Maternal death is the death of a woman while pregnant or within 42 days of termination of pregnancy, irrespective of the duration and the site of the pregnancy, from any cause related to or aggravated by the pregnancy or its management, but not from accidental or incidental causes. Maternal deaths should be subdivided into two groups. Direct obstetric deaths are those resulting from obstetric complications of the pregnant state (pregnancy, labor, and puerperium), from interventions, omissions, incorrect treatment, or from a chain of events resulting from any of the above. Indirect obstetric deaths are those resulting from previous existing disease or disease that developed during pregnancy, and which was not due to direct obstetric causes, but which was aggravated by physiologic effects of pregnancy.

World Health Organization, *International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems, 10th Revision (ICD-10)* (Geneva, 2004), 98–99.

There are many factors that affect the outcome of pregnancy, but it is most adversely affected by delays that occur in seeking, reaching, and receiving health care. Delays can occur when seeking care due to socioeconomic factors, individual and community perceptions of accessibility and quality of care, and cultural/traditional practices that restrict women from seeking healthcare. Delays in reaching care can occur due to the distance to reach healthcare facilities and the inability to afford transport costs, and delays in receiving care can happen due to inadequate facilities and poorly skilled staff and management (Thaddeus and Maine 1994).

The causes of maternal deaths vary with time. The proportion of maternal deaths due to unsafe abortion and infection have declined in the last decades due to improvement in laws, access to safe abortion and post-abortion care, and an increase in awareness about safe abortion. However, obstructed labour continues to be the major cause of maternal deaths, while hypertensive disorders and haemorrhages showed an increasing trend (Yifru and Asres 2014). Central Statistical Agency & ICF (2016) indicates that maternal mortality (MM) is decreasing. However, the current maternal mortality ratio is still high, with an estimated 412 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births for the 7 years before the 2016 EDHS survey. The EDHS 2000–2011 conducted by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA 2012) showed differences in terms of maternal mortality rate between regions and between rural and urban women, and among women with different socioeconomic statuses. Somali, Afar, SNNP, Amhara, and Oromia are estimated to have a higher maternal mortality burden than the national average.

One of the most devastating events for women who survived maternal death is the occurrence of obstetric fistula, which occurs when the baby's head cannot pass through the birth canal after prolonged and obstructed labour. Fistula is an opening between the mother's vagina and bladder (vesico-vaginal)

or vagina and rectum (rectovaginal), or both (Donnay and Weil 2004, 71). Obstructed labour is the major cause of obstetric fistula, which can also be caused by other socioeconomic factors, including poverty, malnutrition, women's low status, early marriage, lack of health facilities, and female genital mutilation/cutting. However, fistula can be prevented if adequate care is available and effective prevention measures are undertaken (See for example, Rahwa 2014 & UNFPA & Engender Health 2003). Obstetric fistula can result in negative social, psychological, and physical consequences. The late Dr Catherine Hamlin (1924–2020) and her late husband were the first to discover women with fistula in Ethiopia and to officially open the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital in 1974.

2.2. Abortion

Source 91. Safe and unsafe abortion

The definition of abortion varies from one source to another. According to the technical and procedural guidelines for safe abortion services in Ethiopia, abortion is the termination of pregnancy before fetal viability, which is conventionally taken to be less than 28 weeks from the last normal menstrual period (LNMP). If the LNMP is not known, a birth weight of less than 1000 gm is considered abortion.

Ministry of Health, Department of Family Health, *Technical and Procedural Guidelines for Safe Abortion Services in Ethiopia* (Addis Ababa, 2006), 5.

Unsafe abortion is defined as “a procedure for terminating an unintended pregnancy carried out either by persons lacking the necessary skills or in an environment that does not conform to minimal medical standards, or both”

WHO. *Safe Abortion: Technical and Policy Guidance for Health Systems* (Geneva: World Health Organization 2003) 12.

Unsafe abortion is one of the major causes of maternal deaths, although the proportion of maternal deaths occurring due to unsafe abortion has declined in Ethiopia. Unsafe abortion can also cause other complications, including haemorrhage, sepsis, and trauma to the cervix, vagina, uterus, and abdominal organs.

Ethiopia's laws on abortion have been changing over time from being too restrictive to semi-liberal. Part of the *Fəthä Nägäst* content (Chapter XLVIII, Corporal and Spiritual Punishment for Fornication; VII–72) that dealt with abortion, as cited in Wada (2008: 20), states, “if a woman conceives and wants to abort the unborn child in her womb, she shall be beaten and exiled.” The 1930 Penal Code allowed no exceptions to abortion, and abortion was punishable by imprisonment. The 1957 Penal Code departed from the *Fəthä Nägäst* and the 1930 Penal Code and recognised grounds on which abortion is performed, such as to save the life of the women and to preserve the physical and mental health of women. The enactment of the new criminal code in 2004 overturned

previous restrictive laws or positions on abortion. The revised criminal code of 2004 introduced major changes and allowed a woman to abort in cases of rape/incest, fetal impairment, to save the life of the woman and to preserve the physical and mental health of the woman (Wada 2008, 20). Although the abortion law in Ethiopia has been classified as ‘semi-liberal,’ it does not ensure access. There is need to focus attention from the content of policy to socioeconomic and political contexts that affect the relationship between abortion laws, policies, and access to health services (Blystad et al. 2019).

Abortion decision-making is an intra-subjective process that involves moral and/or religious dilemmas and considerations of health and safety. Though there is widespread condemnation of female premarital sex and moral sanction against induced abortion, young Ethiopian women still seek induced abortions, which could result in grave physical harm and social stigmatisation (Meselu et al. 2012). A study by Moore et al. (2016) further indicated that an estimated 620,300 induced abortions were performed in Ethiopia in 2014, and the annual abortion rate increased from 22 per 1,000 in 2008 to 28 per 1,000 among women aged 15-49 years in 2014. The proportion of abortions occurring in facilities increased from 27% to 53% between 2008 and 2014, and treatment for complications from induced abortion nearly doubled between 2008 and 2014, from 52,600 to 103,600. The proportion of women accessing post-abortion care (PAC) has also increased. The expansion of comprehensive abortion care, improved access to health care services, greater availability of free services, and increase in contraceptive use accounted for the improvement. Nevertheless, significant numbers of abortions continue to occur outside of health facilities under unsafe conditions: one-third of adolescent abortions are clandestine and thus potentially unsafe. Complications from unsafe abortions account for 19.6% of all maternal deaths (Tessema et al. 2017).

2.3. A historical account of syphilis and HIV/AIDS

Pankhurst (1975) dedicated one of his articles to the old-time treatment for syphilis (17th-20th centuries). In the course of his research, he mentioned epidemics and venereal diseases that were cured with hot water during the 1930s. He also mentioned that soldiers and merchants were the biggest spreaders of venereal diseases. Cases of syphilis were known at the end of the 1890s. Richard Pankhurst quoted a Shoan couplet recorded by Marcel Cohen: “ቁጥኝም፡ቢያዘኝ፡ለውሃ፡እወርዳለሁ፡” (“if I catch syphilis, I will go down to the hot water”). In 1949, Thorstein Guthe (1949) wrote a report for the World Health Organization (WHO) on venereal diseases in Ethiopia. In the 1960s, people used to believe that the best cure for syphilis was to have as many sexual encounters as possible to weaken the disease. From 1974 to 2000, some medical studies and reports were found on venereal diseases, especially on syphilis and some reproductive health issues.

The prevalence of syphilis had declined globally over the last three decades. No nationwide studies in Ethiopia show the prevalence and the epidemiology of syphilis among all and specific groups of the population. However, both available antenatal care-based sentinel HIV surveillance and individual studies on syphilis show inconsistencies in the prevalence of syphilis, with antenatal care-based sentinel HIV surveillance showing a decline of syphilis from 2.7% in 2007 to 2.3% in 2009; in 2012 and 2014 showing a slight increment of syphilis prevalence from 1.0% in 2012 to 1.2% in 2014 (Kebede et al. 2019).

HIV infection and syphilis are interlinked as the higher prevalence of one worsens the other. HIV/AIDS has been studied since the end of the 1990s along with other venereal disease studies, especially syphilis. HIV infections were first found in Ethiopia in 1984, and the relatively virulent HIV-1 is the major strain of the virus in Ethiopia. During the 1980s and 1990s, HIV/AIDS was mainly spread by commercial sex workers and truck drivers. Children, adolescents, and the general population were increasingly infected (Kloos 2001).

HIV prevalence varies based on age, sex, and geographical location. According to EDHS (2011), HIV prevalence among men aged 15–49 years is 1.0 percent, while among women aged 15–49 is 1.9 percent, and HIV prevalence is highest among women aged 30–34 years and men aged 35–39 years. According to a recent estimate by EPHI (2017), the adult prevalence of HIV in Ethiopia is estimated to be 1.13% in 2019, which falls under the category of an outbreak. The epidemic has been a threat to the social and economic fabric of the country, including voluntary social institutions such as *Addar* (a form of community-based funeral association) (Pankhurst and Mariam 2000).

Biological, social, and cultural factors put women and adolescent girls at greater risk of HIV infection when compared with men. Women's vulnerability to HIV/AIDS is increased through a culture of silence surrounding sex, women's economic dependency on marriage, violence against women, and power imbalance in gender. While men's vulnerability to HIV/AIDS is increased through traditional notions of masculinity that expect men to engage in a wide range of risk-taking behaviour, to be well-informed and experienced about sex, to have a variety of sexual partners, to be self-contained and not to express their emotions and seek assistance when needed (Gupta 2000).

3. The issues of child marriage and family planning

3.1. *Child marriage*

There is lack of a universally accepted definition for the age of marriage, as it can be defined socially and in terms of age. According to international human rights documents, childhood is regarded as lasting until an individual reaches the age of eighteen. The practice of child marriage violates a range of human rights, including those contained in the Convention on the Rights

Source 92. Example of Proclamations on Child marriages

A child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.

UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)*, art. 1, 1989.

Child marriage and the betrothal of girls and boys shall be prohibited and effective action, including legislation, shall be taken to specify the minimum age of marriage to be eighteen years.

Organization of African Unity (OAU), *African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child*, art. 21, 1990.

of the Child (CRC) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The previous Ethiopian family law, which was adopted in 1960, set the legal age for marriage at 15 years for girls and 18 for boys. The newly revised family law adopted in 2000 set 18 years as the minimum age of marriage for both girls and boys. The new law also states that marriage should be entered into with the full consent of the intending spouses (Federal Negarit Gazetta of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia 2000). The practice of child marriage has shown a decline in recent years in Ethiopia. EDHS 2016 shows that the median age at marriage increased from 16.5 years in 2011 to 17.1 years in 2016, and the percentage of women who married before age 18 decreased from 63% in 2011 to 58% in 2016. There are not only differences in terms of the practice of child marriage between regions, but variation also exists in different localities within a region (Jones et al. 2016). However, COVID-19 seriously threatened the progress that has been made in the last decade, with 10 million additional girls at risk of child marriage globally (UNICEF 2021).

The main types of child marriage can be categorised as: arranged, abduction, and free choice. Arranged marriage can be performed at any time during childhood, and it includes promissory marriage, where a marriage is arranged while the foetus is in the uterus. Abduction is widely practised in the southern part of Ethiopia, where a high bride price is offered in the form of cattle or money to the family of the bride. Free-will marriage is becoming common in contexts where marriage occurs in late adolescence or early adulthood, mainly in urbanised areas (UNICEF 2016, 11).

Early marriage arrangement patterns change in line with the changing historical, political, and socioeconomic conditions. Early marriage was arranged for political alliance through dynastic intermarriage before 1941, and it was practised for economic reasons from 1941 to 1975, mainly to gain access to land. From the late 1980s to the present, it is practised for cultural and religious or sociocultural reasons such as societal desire to control girls' sexuality and maintain their purity, girls' wish to avoid the stigma directed at unmarried

girls, families desire to form social and economic alliances with other families and to secure care and protection for their daughters (Alemante 2004).

Child marriage has negative social, psychological, and economic consequences for girls. It violates girls' basic human rights and results in unequal partnerships in marriage, which often end in divorce or separation. It also restricts girls' decision-making power and can increase the risks of maternal health problems and sexually transmitted diseases (UNICEF 2016).

Source 93. Education for ending child marriage

Education is instrumental for ending child marriage and the Education Sector Development Programme V (ESDP V) 2015/16–2019/20 is clear on its merits: “educated women are less likely to enter early marriage or early motherhood or contract HIV/AIDS and other communicable diseases. Mothers who are literate are better able to understand health education and child developmental materials that directly impact the lives of their children.” ESDP V notes that despite progress, there remain some critical gaps in reducing gender disparity in primary and particularly secondary education and acknowledges that factors that influence demand for secondary education include child marriage and that the proportion of females in higher education needs to increase.

Ministry of Women, Children and Youth, *National Costed Roadmap to end Child Marriage and FMG/C 2020–2024* (Addis Ababa: Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 2019), 31.

Building upon previous measures to eliminate harmful traditional practices in Ethiopia, the Ministry of Women, Children, and Youth developed the National Costed Roadmap to End Child Marriage and FGM/C by 2025. The roadmap stipulated a comprehensive set of strategies, such as empowering girls and families; enhancing engagement of communities; strengthening systems; ensuring an enabling environment and disseminating data and evidence for informed policy and programmatic engagement. Despite these policies and strategies and laws against child marriage, communities continue to use different social tactics to perpetuate the practice. Combined initiatives that target to transform social and gender norms through continuous dialogue and interventions that aim to increase girls' education and use them as change agents remain pertinent.

3.2. Family planning

Family planning is vital in saving and safeguarding women's lives and meeting their practical and strategic needs. It is not only a matter of human rights but is also critical to empowering women, reducing poverty, and achieving sustainable development.

The Family Guidance Association of Ethiopia (FGAE) was established in 1966 as a volunteer-based association, and it is the pioneer in meeting the needs of modern family planning and other reproductive health services

Source 94. Family planning

Family planning is defined as the ability of individuals or couples to anticipate and attain their desired number of children, and the spacing and timing of their births. It is achieved through use of contraceptive methods and treatment of involuntary infertility.

Ministry of Health, *National Guideline for Family Planning Services in Ethiopia* (Addis Ababa, 2011), 25.

Family planning is also identified by other terms such as “fertility regulation,” “fertility control,” “planned parenthood,” “birth control,” and “contraceptive services.” Total fertility rate refers to the average number of children a woman would have by the end of her childbearing years if she bore children at the current age-specific fertility rates.

Central Statistical Agency (CSA) and ICF, *Ethiopia Demographic and Health Survey 2016* (Addis Ababa: CSA; Rockville, Maryland: ICF, 2016), 77.

by targeting poor, under-served, youth and marginalised segments of the population in the country. FGAE provided its first family planning service from a single-room clinic that was run by one nurse. FGAE has a network of 8 branch offices, 7 higher clinics, 15 Medium SRH clinics, 13 youth centres, 10 sex-worker friendly clinics (SWFCs), and 1 gynaecology and obstetrics speciality clinic. Until 1982, a husband’s signed consent was required by the Family Guidance Association of Ethiopia to provide contraceptives to his wife. As a result, 16% of the women who requested contraceptives were not provided with the service. After the requirement of spousal authorisation was removed, utilisation of family planning services increased by 26% within a few months (Cook et al. 1987).

According to EDHS 2016, total fertility rate has continued to drop. Total fertility rate was 5.5 in 2000 and it dropped to 4.6 in 2016 (2.3 in urban areas and 5.2 in rural areas). Yet despite these impressive gains, modern contraceptive use is still low (35%). The survey further indicates that highly educated women and women living in Addis Ababa have lower fertility rates. Women mostly use injectables, followed by implants. Public sector (84%) followed by private medical sector (14%) were the most used sources for modern contraception. Facilities providing family planning services have expanded in terms of number and outreach in Ethiopia. Despite the improvements, over one-third of all contraceptive users (35%) discontinued the use of contraceptives within 12 months.

The above progresses have been made over the last two decades due to government integration of family planning as a component of the 16 health packages of primary healthcare and development of health infrastructure, and human resources for health. The government has also integrated UHC as a main objective of Ethiopia’s five-year health sector transformation plan

and has implemented community-based health insurance (CBHI) in several *Woredas* or districts for people who are not employed in Ethiopia's formal economy. However, because family planning and maternal and child health-care are currently free through funding from external donors, they are not covered under community-based health insurance (CBHI). Further, women encounter barriers to accessing their preferred methods of contraception due to lack of supply, poor spousal communication, and inequitable fertility decision-making. This is further aggravated by healthcare workers' inequitable targeting of women for family planning promotion within the primary healthcare system. Despite prevailing and constraining gender and patriarchal order and resistance from husbands, women exercise their own agency by using silence as a strategy to use contraceptives without the knowledge of their husbands (Mjaaland 2014).

Conclusion

Ethiopia implemented the Health Sector Transformation Plan (HSTP-I) from July 2015–June 2020, which resulted in reduction in maternal mortality, improved utilisation of contraception by married women, increased antenatal coverage, and access to safe abortion services and post-abortion care. During this period, Ethiopia implemented financial risk protection to increase access to essential health services through the provision of high-impact interventions free of charge; subsidisation of more than 80% of the cost of care in public health facilities, and implementation of community-based health insurance (CBHI) scheme (MOH 2021, 10). Despite these improvements, the unmet need for contraception remains high (22%) and the maternal mortality rate was 401 per 100,000 live births in 2017 (MOH 2021) and family planning is not integrated into community-based health insurance (CBHI). Furthermore, the existing harmful traditional practices continue to violate women's bodily autonomy and compromise their social and psychological integrity and constrain their choices and agencies. Therefore, given the importance of primary healthcare to achieve sustainable and equitable health services, investment in health care infrastructure and the development of a skilled, well compensated, and compassionate health workforce is critical. Moreover, government efforts should be backed by the involvement of civil society organisations to support domestic resource mobilisation efforts and ensure equity and quality in the delivery of health services. Civil society organisations also play a key role in holding the government accountable for its commitments/policies and their implementation. In addition, given that reproductive decisions are made within existing social and gender relations, it is essential to implement interventions that address social and gender norms and support women's empowerment by creating and reinforcing positive social norms,

engaging men and youth as active participants in health-seeking processes and promoting equitable couple's decision-making.

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Chapter 21

Women and Prostitution

“(In history, it existed) varieties of prostitution and prostitutes, from the cultured and powerful Athenian courtesans of the fourth century, to the professional dancer performing at men’s symposia, to the poor streetwalkers”

Hapelperin and Winkler (1990, 18).

Like many issues in the social history of Ethiopia, the study of prostitution in the country suffers from lack of adequate sources and studies. There are very few and scattered primary and secondary sources on the subject. There is also hardly any historical work on prostitution other than an article published by Richard Pankhurst in 1974. All the other studies on prostitution in Ethiopia are sociological and anthropological works and focus on current conditions only. They therefore lack depth in terms of time. Pankhurst’s reconstruction is mainly based on the accounts of foreign travellers. He is, therefore, necessarily confined to the areas and times of the travellers, who mainly visited Northern Ethiopia. He leaves out the areas that were not visited by them. In terms of time also, the 19th and 20th centuries are covered more than earlier periods. To overcome this problem of sources, in this chapter, some linguistic materials have been used to examine prostitution in pre-20th century Ethiopia. Then, mainly based on Pankhurst’s work, we consider the history of prostitution in Ethiopia until the end of the Italian occupation (1941). Finally, this chapter will provide a brief critical review of sociological and anthropological studies that have been conducted on the subject in Ethiopia after the end of the Italian occupation.

1. Prostitution in Ethiopia: a historical sketch

1.1. *A vague definition of a prostitute in pre-20th century Ethiopia*

There are indications that prostitution existed in Ethiopia as early as the Medieval and Gondärine periods. However, in pre-20th century Ethiopia, as in other rural or partially urbanised societies, being called “a prostitute” may not necessarily have depended on whether or not a woman actually sold sex. It might refer to the woman’s relationship to men in general. For example, it might be enough that a woman is not officially tied to one man by marriage (or

that she had been widowed or divorced for a long time) for her to be suspected of prostitution. It might also be related to certain kinds of activities that are believed to be associated with selling sex. Typical of such activities is the selling of alcoholic drinks. However, they might also include other activities that are believed to bring many males into the house of a woman or that put a woman into the presence of many men. A woman who is not married, who runs a drinking place or who travels around as a singer, might thus be very easily linked to prostitution whether she also sells sex or not. In traditional Ethiopia, it is possible to argue that the term “prostitute” had a very wide application and connotation, so wide, in fact, that it appears to have included virtually everything that women might do if they were not married and were not part of households headed by men. It appears that it was only later, with growing urbanisation and commercialisation in the country, that prostitution was gradually separated from the many cultural and social manifestations with which it was associated. It is only in more contemporary times, that the term has been developed into the strictly cash-for-sex sense, as found today in the dictionary.

For example, in the traditional highland society of Ethiopia, terms which derived from the marital status of the woman, or more generally from her position *vis-à-vis* men like *setana adari*, *galamota*, *fat*, and *qarre* (or *qirri*) were used to denote or to describe a “prostitute.” Other terms which referred to the occupation or to the means of livelihood of the woman such as *komarit*, *bala-mashata*, *atari*, *amarit* (or *azmarit*) and *ganbona* also had the connotation of “prostitute.”

These connotations are illustrated by the Portuguese chaplain Francisco Alvares who stayed from 1520 to 1526 at the court of King Ləbnä Dəngəl (1508–1540). In his description of the royal camp, he mentioned the presence of the tents of the so-called prostitutes named “Amaritas,” a word translated at the beginning of the 20th century by the linguist Ignazio Guidi as a female minstrel or dancing girl.

Source 95. Prostitution in royal camps during the 16th century

Francisco Alvarez described “the tents of the prostitutes, whom they call Amaritas.” as living apart from the rest of the camp, near the lodging of strangers who came to “sell, buy and trade with the Prester’s court;” they were very numerous and most (an “immense number”) were “rich and well dressed.”

Francisco Alvares in Charles F. Beckingham and Georges W. B. Huntingford. *The Prester John of the Indies: A True Relation of the Lands of the Prester John, Being the Narrative of the Portuguese Embassy to Ethiopia in 1520* (Cambridge: Hakluyt Society, 1961), 43.

Galāmota ገለሞታ was the most popular or the most widely used term. The first mention of this word is to be found in the royal chronicle of King Iyasu I (1682–1706).

Source 96. Mention of a house of a prostitute in 1699

“On the 11th of <i>miyazya</i> [1699], the day after Palm Sunday, a fire broke out in the house of a prostitute and burned all the houses of the city in the <i>grabet</i> (left quarter) of Gondar.”	
Ignazio Guidi, <i>Annales Iohannis I, Iyasu et Bakäffa</i> (Louvain: CSCO, 1905), 187.	

Table 11. Dictionaries are a way to study the word Galāmota by Bethlehem Tekola

Sources	Definition
C. W. Isenberg, <i>Dictionary of the Amharic Language</i> (London, 1841), 170.	“whore, harlot, prostitute”
Ignazio Guidi, <i>Vocabulario amarico-italiano</i> (Roma, 1901), col. 421.	“whore, harlot or prostitute”
Wolf Leslau, <i>Comparative Dictionary of Ge’ez</i> (Wiesbaden, 1987), 727.	“prostitute” mah.az (p. 338: adultery, prostitution, lover, adulterer, prostitute), <i>zam-māwit</i> (whore, harlot, prostitute, adulteress)
Desta Tekle Wold, <i>Ya Amarina Mazgaba Kalat</i> (Addis Ababa: Artistic Printers, 1970 E.C.), 266.	“(a woman)... who does not have a husband, loose, harlot, one who is not limited to one man...”
Kidanewold Kifle, <i>Mūs’hafū sāwasiw wāmüzgäbū k’alat hadis</i> (Dire Dawa, Addis Ababa, 1948 E.C.), 317.	“(easily) available, loose (woman) (...) <i>Bala-Mashata</i> that is the owner of a drinking place (...)”

Source: Pankhurst (1974).

Our sources indicate that the simultaneous uses of these words with “prostitute” include dictionaries prepared by Ethiopian writers as well as the foreign travellers whom Richard Pankhurst has quoted. Desta Teklewold puts *amarit* and *ganbona* together, which he defines as “singer, woman of melody, domestic servant, minstrel, (one who) insults people...”

There are, however, two exceptions that should be pointed out about the 19th and early 20th century period. One is that, in the areas that were brought under European rule, like Eritrea, prostitution in the real sense of the term was very well known. Secondly, the 19th century saw an increasing use of the Arabic term for prostitute, *sharmuta*, which indicates that full time prostitution might have started also near the coastal areas and along the main centres of trade. It is, however, largely in the 20th century, with the urbanisation of the country and the commercialisation of services, that prostitution appears to have appeared more clearly and specifically.

1.2. Gondär, other centres and prostitution in the 19th century

Whereas little information is found to establish the strict existence of prostitution before the 19th century, in the eyes of foreign travellers Gondär

appeared to have witnessed prostitution as a widespread profession. In his article Richard Pankhurst detailed the opposition raised by Emperor Tewodros (1855–1868) against the practice in Gondär of *däbtäras*, monks or lay cleric visiting *galāmota* or the wives of others.

He also demonstrated that the practice of prostitution was also observed in other commercial towns, like Adwa, Däbrä Tabor, Qoraṭa or Liče and mentioned some other testimonies, such as that by the Armenian priest Dimotheos, that showed that it was widespread in other parts of the country, in towns and military camps.

Richard Pankhurst also used the dictionaries of the late 19th century and beginning of the 20th century to explain that prostitution was known in other regions like in Harar, in the Somali, Afar and Oromo regions by demonstrating that the word “prostitute” was known and used in all languages.

Richard Pankhurst, the sole author on the history of prostitution, indicated that ports and trade routes were important places for the activities of prostitutes, taking the example of the vicinities of Massäwa or of the Sudan borders. He also stated that prices for services ranged from a quarter to eight Maria Theresa dollars.

2. The history of prostitution at the beginning of the 20th century

2.1. *The development of urban centres and prostitution*

The development of urban settlements in Ethiopia, specifically the development of Addis Ababa into a permanent centre of government with the building of the Addis-Djibouti railway and the construction of roads that linked the capital to other parts of the country were important developments for the history of modern prostitution in Ethiopia.

Particularly, there were two characteristics of the early urbanisation of Addis Ababa (and to a limited extent of the other urban centres like Dire-Dawa and Adama) that are important for the history of prostitution. One is that virtually all the inhabitants of the towns were immigrants from the countryside. Due to the economic and social conditions at the time, however, female immigrants, particularly the unmarried ones, had little chance of employment outside of the service sector. Secondly, the town was always full of many temporary visitors and travellers. Many of these men were followers of the military governors of the provinces visiting the Emperor. There were also the followers of the *daja tani**, the lords who stayed in town hoping to receive appointments. These men at least partly depended on the services of the various eating, drinking and sleeping places in the town. It is, therefore, clear that hotel and bar businesses in the early decades of this century were dominated by women and that clients were mostly men who were away from their homes and from their families. These two elements appear to

have allowed the expansion of prostitution in the new towns, particularly in the capital. In the early 1920s, the testimony of Mərab, quoted by Richard Pankhurst, gives extensive details about the functioning of some drinking houses that hosted prostitutes and clients. The researcher also provided more testimonies dating from the 1920s to the 1930s about the concerns of officials and intellectuals concerning the spread and location of “bawdy houses” and “brothels” in the city. He mentioned the confusing uses of a Red Cross sign, which was prohibited in the 1930s, shown outside drinking houses to publicize prostitution activities.

2.2. *The Italian occupation of Ethiopia and the spread of prostitution*

The Italian occupation of Ethiopia brought about the increasing commercialisation and expansion of prostitution in Ethiopia. The fact that the number of Italian men and women who came to the country was imbalanced contributed to the situation. To meet the demand of a very large army, the colonial authorities encouraged divorced and single women to come to towns and set up bars and brothels. To satisfy the interests of their army, they even tried to import prostitutes from Europe. Quoting Poggiali as his source, Pankhurst states that the Italians imported some French prostitutes to the country. But soon, the French prohibited the act due to its implications for “French racial dignity.” Since using Italian women as prostitutes was strictly forbidden for reasons of prestige, the Italian army had to depend on Ethiopian women for sexual gratification.



Figure 32. L. Naretti, *Sifilicomio di Asmara*

Both before and after the conflict, the Italians had a rather carefree attitude towards sex with “native women,” somewhat contrary to their strict racial policies in other matters. Before the conflict, the Italians made extensive use of native women as local wives, called “madams” in Eritrea (see Source 97). In fact, in addition to prostitution, what is called colonial *concubinage* (*madamato*), a relationship between native women and foreigners, has been studied and even has its own literature. The preparation for the invasion of Ethiopia also brought about the expansion of prostitution in Eritrea. The coming of many Italian soldiers and labourers to the colony created extensive demands for sex, leading to considerable sexual violence by Italian men on local women. The

war had, in fact, a significant effect on Italian attitudes toward sex in Africa. One of the chief ways of attracting volunteers into the Italian army was the dissemination of pornographic literature and pornographic pictures displaying the tender, attractive bodies of Ethiopian women.

Source 97. The “madams”

The “madams,” in the words of Pankhurst, “had become an integral scene (of colonial society in Eritrea) where there continued to be a chronic shortage of European women.”

Richard Pankhurst, “Fascist Racial Policies in Ethiopia 1922–1941,” *Ethiopia Observer* 12, no. 4 (1969), 270–71.

The Fascist authorities sponsored the publication in Italy of numerous erotic or semi-erotic postcards showing the beauties of Ethiopian womanhood. Soldiers’ songs were composed about the charms of Ethiopian girls.

Source 98. *Facceta Nera*

“(...) official encouragement was given to the soldiers’ song *Facceta Nera*, which declared: ‘*Facceta Nera bella abissinia*’ i.e. ‘Little black face beautiful Abyssinian,’ and told how she will be kissed by invaders.”

Richard Pankhurst, “The History of Prostitution in Ethiopia,” *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 12, no. 2 (1974), 173, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41965872>.

As a result, following the occupation Addis Ababa had become the main centre of prostitution in Italian East Africa. Many Ethiopian women, single or divorced, were forced into the practice, some quite literally. Moreover, the effect of the war on family life was enormous for Ethiopians. Because of the war, many family breadwinners, almost always men, either lost their lives or joined the resistance movement. So, the war left many women without means of supporting themselves and their children. Given the fact that employment opportunities were virtually nil, many had to turn to the only alternative available to starvation: employment in the drinking houses and selling their bodies.

Source 99. Colonial domination of female bodies

Babu Lali Bali, an Indian non-commissioned officer in the Indian Medical Department, described the situation: “Any Italian soldier could go into any native house and bring out any girl he liked. The parents who objected were beaten to death, sometimes. And if anyone filed a suit in the court, the judge would remark: ‘are you not proud that an Italian has taken a fancy to (sic.) your daughter or sister?’”

New Times and Ethiopia News (January 24, 1942), 3–4.



Figure 33. "Ufficio Postale." Popular Postcard in Italy 1930s



Figure 34. "Al Mercato." Popular Postcard in Italy 1930s

Very few women who were driven to prostitution out of desperation came out of it, even after the husbands of some of them returned home. Their intimate association with the Italians created a sense of uncleanness and of

shame out of which they were unable to extract themselves. Many, therefore, continued as prostitutes. Consequently, the number of women who were engaged in prostitution increased dramatically. It was reported that by 1938 there were approximately 1,500 Ethiopian women involved, each occupying a house, as well as three brothels where 47 white women were reserved exclusively for Italian nationals.

Source 100. Italian occupation of Addis Ababa and the growth of brothels

Ladislav Sava, a Hungarian physician who lived in the city at the time, described the situation clearly: "(...) With the Italian occupation of the capital, two houses in the first two days and a great many afterwards, were converted into brothels under the supervision of an Italian commander... I several times witnessed the deportation of women to such houses with revolting violence, one girl being attacked by three or four armed soldiers of civilisation. A whole street near the former Town Hall, which they call now the Palazzo di Roma, was converted into a pleasure garden for Italian soldiery, where Abyssinian girls were kept close prisoners for the sensual delight of the enemy"

New Times and Ethiopia News (January 24, 1942), 3.

Among the distinctive contributions of the Italian period were the official efforts that were made to register and licence prostitutes *as prostitutes*. The main motive behind this registration and licensing was, of course, to control sexually transmitted or venereal diseases. The figures given above are, therefore, official figures about registered or at least "officially known" prostitutes. They are, therefore, likely to be underestimations of the actual number of women who were in the business.

Of course, the Italians did not fully succeed in their efforts to limit or eliminate venereal diseases. Both official and unofficial sources indicate that the Italian army was ravaged by these diseases. Medical supplies or treatments could not keep up with the rate of infections. For instance, a single record of cases over a period of 15 months showed that there were 11,000 new infections. Some of the diseases were so horrific that many Italian soldiers committed suicide upon learning of the nature of their infections, as was reported in newspapers, such as *New Times and Ethiopia News* (January 24, 1942).

It is significant, however, that prostitution as the business of selling sex as such, not just as a side business going with selling other things, was officially recognised and licensed during the Italian period. This is a very significant watershed in the history of this practice and marks a new phase in its evolution.

3. Sociological and anthropological works on prostitution in Ethiopia in the postliberation period

Prostitution has been an important and attractive topic for sociological and anthropological research in Ethiopia. Interest in the topic, which goes back to the 1960s, has increased by leaps and bounds since the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s.

3.1. *Only a few themes in research*

In terms of themes, research on prostitution in Ethiopia has tended to be highly repetitive often focusing on “causes of prostitution,” “types of prostitution” and “consequences of prostitution.” There is often a tendency to focus on either the factors that drive women to “prostitution,” such as early marriage, or on the social problems that prostitution created. Very little effort has been made to explore the perspectives and experiences of women who are already in the sex business or to place prostitution in the context of wider socioeconomic conditions and processes (for exceptions, let us mention the works of Laketch in 1978, of Tekola in 2005, Selamawit in 2009 and Sehin in 2015). It appears that this was partly a result of lack of integration, i.e. research projects were often not related to each other or did not refer to each other much. In fact, most of the literature on prostitution has consisted of unpublished reports prepared for government or non-government agencies or small-scale studies by students to fulfil degree requirements.

3.2. *Only a few integrative approaches*

In terms of methodological approach, most of the studies used either quantitative approaches, and more specifically, the case studies of often very small samples of prostitutes through questionnaire-based structured surveys, or qualitative methods which often involved interviewing small numbers of prostitutes. With very few exceptions, little effort has been made to integrate qualitative and quantitative approaches in a single study.

Conclusion

Based on the work of Richard Pankhurst (1974) and some linguistic sources, this chapter provides a historical overview of prostitution in pre-20th century Ethiopia until the end of the Italian occupation (1941). There is no recent history of prostitution. The studies that have been conducted on the subject in Ethiopia after the end of the Italian occupation are mainly sociological and anthropological works that focus on current conditions only. A critical review of sociological and anthropological studies on prostitution in Ethiopia finds that research on prostitution in Ethiopia had tended to be highly repetitive both in terms of themes and methodological approaches, with little integration of research findings. Many writers and researchers who did work

on prostitution also focused on the institution of prostitution rather than the perceptions and experiences of the women who lived in it.

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